THE

DRAMATIC WORKS

OF

M. DE VOLTAIRE.

TRANSLATED

BY THE REV. MR. FRANCKLIN.

VOLUME XXI.

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M, DCC, LXXII.

This Volume contains

A Letter from Mr. De Voltaire to Father Porée, a Jeſuit.

Preface to Oedipus.

Oedipus, a Tragedy.

Preface to Mariamne.

Mariamne, a Tragedy.

Diſcourſe on Tragedy, in a Letter to Lord Bolingbroke.

Brutus, a Tragedy.

A Diſſertation on Antient and Modern Tragedy.

Semiramis, a Tragedy.

A

LETTER

FROM

Mr. VOLTAIRE.

TO

FATHER POREE, a JESUIT.

YOU will receive, my dear father, by this packet, the new edition of my tragedy of Oedipus. I have taken care to waſh out, as well as I could, the diſagreeable colours of a love-plot, very ill placed, which, in ſpite of myſelf, I was obliged to mix with thoſe ſtrokes of the manly and terrible, which the ſubject naturally demands. I muſt at the ſame time inform you, in my own juſtification, that, * young as I was when Oedipus was written, it was then very nearly the ſame as it now ſtands: my mind filled with the reading of the antients, and your judicious reflections on them, and little acquaint-

* Oedipus was written when Mr. de Voltaire was but nineteen years of age. It was played for the firſt time in 1718, and ran five-and-forty nights. Du Frêſne, a celebrated actor, and of the ſame age with the author, played the part of Oedipus; and Madame Deſmarêts, a famous actreſs, did Jocaſta, and ſoon after quitted the ſtage. In this edition, the part of Philoctetes is reſtored, and ſtands exactly as it was in the firſt repreſentation.

ed with the theatre of Paris, I ſet about the performance as if I had been at Athens. I conſulted Mr. Dacier, who was of the country: he adviſed me to put a chorus into every ſcene, after the manner of the Greeks: he might as well have adviſed me to walk about the ſtreets of Paris with Plato's gown on. I had much ado only to perſuade the players to perform the choruſes which appear three or four times in the piece; and greater ſtill was the difficulty to make them act a tragedy almoſt without any love in it: the actreſſes laughed at me when they found there was never a tender ſcene for them; the reciprocal confidence of Oedipus and Jocaſta, taken partly from Sophocles, was thought quite inſipid: in a word, the actors, who at that time were all grand ſigniors and petits-maîtres, abſolutely refuſed to repreſent it. I was extremely young, and believed they might be in the right of it. To pleaſe them, I ſpoiled my play, by inſerting ſeveral unintereſting ſcenes of tenderneſs in a ſubject intirely foreign to them. When I had put a little love into it, they became partly reconciled; but would by no means permit me to bring in the grand ſcene between Oedipus and Jocaſta: Sophocles and his imitator were treated with equal contempt. I ſtill perſevered, repeated my reaſons, employed my friends to ſolicit, and at laſt, by dint of powerful protection, got my Oedipus on the ſtage. One of the actors, whoſe name was Quinant, declared openly, that the piece ſhould be played exactly as it was written, with the vile fourth act taken from the Greek; which would be a ſufficient puniſhment for my obſtinacy. Beſides all this, I was looked on as a raſh young man, for daring to write on a ſubject which the great Corneille had already treated ſo ſucceſsfully. At that time

Corneille's

Corneille's Oedipus was eſteemed a maſter-piece: I thought it a poor performance, but durſt not ſay ſo till about twelve years after, when all the world were of the ſame opinion. In things of this nature, it is generally ſome years before ſtrict juſtice is ſuffered to take place. The two tragedies of La Motte on this ſubject met with it indeed a little ſooner than ordinary. Father Tournemine has, I ſuppoſe, ſhewn to you the little preface in which I have attacked him. Monſ. de la Motte has a great deal of wit: he is not unlike the famous Grecian wreſtler, who, when he was thrown down, could always prove that he was uppermoſt. We totally diſagree in our opinions; but you have taught me to diſpute like a man of honour and a gentleman. I wrote againſt him with ſo much politeneſs, that I even deſired him to criticiſe himſelf that preface, wherein I have endeavoured in every line to prove him in the wrong; and my little polemic diſſertation met with his applauſe. This is the method which men of letters ſhould always make uſe of in their controverſies with each other; and this they would always purſue, who had been under your tuition: but they are generally as full of acrimony as a lawyer, and as angry as a Janſeniſt. Polite literature is grown, of all things, the moſt unpolite. We cabal, we aſperſe, we calumniate, we write verſes againſt one another. It is pleaſant enough that we ſhould be at liberty to tell folks in writing what we dare not ſpeak to their faces. You, my dear father, taught me to avoid all ſuch mean practices; how to live, as well as how to write.

With love alone the heav'n-born muſes glow,
No jealous pangs th' immortal ſiſters know;

They taſte no gall, but with ambroſia fed,
O'er all their kind their genial influence ſhed;
When Jove convenes them to the bleſt abodes,
He calls not ſatire to the feaſts of gods,
Leſt the foul fiend ſhould ranc'rous hate inſpire,
And jar the ſtrings of their harmonious lyre.

Adieu, my dear father, and believe me attached to you and yours by that tender regard which I owe you, and which thoſe who were educated by you do not always retain.

Paris, Jan. 7th,
1729.

PREFACE.

PREFACE.

THE Oedipus, now re-printed, was repreſented for the firſt time at the end of the year 1718, and received with great indulgence by the public, it has ever ſince that time ſupported itſelf on the ſtage, and is ſeen to this day with ſome pleaſure, in ſpite of all its faults; a circumſtance which I attribute partly to its advantage of being always well acted, and partly to the pomp and ſolemnity of the ſpectacle, together with ſome intrinſic merit in the piece. P. Folard, the jeſuit, and Mr. de la Motte, * of the French academy, have both of them ſince treated the ſame ſubject, and both avoided the errors which I had fallen into. It is not my buſineſs to criticiſe their performances, my cenſures and my praiſes would be equally liable to ſuſpicion: ſtill further is my intention from pretending to lay down rules for writing tragedy. I am perſuaded, that all thoſe refined reaſonings, ſo often reiterated, are ſcarce worth one ſingle ſcene of genius; and that we may learn more from † Cinna and Polyeucte, than from all the precepts of ‡ D'Aubignac. Severus and Paulinus are true maſters of the art. All the

* Monſ. de la Motte preſented the world with two Oedipus's, one in verſe, the other in proſe, in the year 1726: that in verſe was played four times; the proſe was never repreſented at all. See La Motte's works, duodecimo. vol. ii. and iii.

† Cinna and Polyeucte, two tragedies by Corneille.

‡ La Pratique du Theatre, par l'Abbé D'Aubignac, a very judicious and ſenſible performance.

books on painting, which were ever written by the greateſt connoiſſeurs, would not give a young painter half the inſtruction as only the ſight of a head by Raphael.

The principles of all the arts that depend on the imagination are eaſy and ſimple, all drawn from nature and from reaſon. Our Pradons and Boyers knew them as well as our Corneilles and Racines; the only difference was, and always will be, in their application of them. The worſt compoſers had the ſame rules of muſic before them, as the authors of Armida and Iſſe. Pouſſin worked upon the ſame principles as Vignon. 'Tis as uſeleſs, therefore, to talk of rules in a preface to a tragedy, as it would be to a painter to endeavour to prejudice the public in his favour, by a diſſertation on his pictures; or to a muſician, to prove by demonſtration, that his compoſitions muſt be ſure to pleaſe.

But ſince Monſ. de la Motte ſeems deſirous of eſtabliſhing rules, directly oppoſite to thoſe which our great maſters ſubmitted to, it is but juſt to defend the antient laws; not becauſe they are ancient, but becauſe they are good and neceſſary, and becauſe thoſe laws might find a very powerful adverſary in a man of his diſtinguiſhed merit.

Of the three Unities.

Mr. de la Motte would aboliſh the unities of action, time, and place. The French were the firſt of the moderns, who revived the wiſe rules of the antient theatre: other nations refuſed for a long time ſubmiſſion to a yoke, which they thought too ſevere; but as the laws were juſt, and reaſon muſt triumph at laſt, in proceſs of time

time they yielded alſo. Even in England, at this day, authors give us notice at the beginning of their pieces, that the time employed in the action is equal to that of the repreſentation, and thus go further than ourſelves who taught them. All nations now begin to look upon thoſe ages as barbarous, when this practice was entirely unknown to the greateſt geniuſes, ſuch as Lopez de Vega and Shakeſpeare; they acknowledge their obligation to us for awakening them from this gothiciſm; and ſhall a Frenchman after this exerciſe all his wit and abilities to reduce us once more to the ſame ſtandard?

Had I nothing more to offer in oppoſition to Mr. de la Motte, than that Corneille, Racine, Moliere, Addiſon, Congreve, and Maffei, have all obſerved the rules of the theatre, it would be ſufficient to prevent the violation of them; but a man of ſuch ſuperior underſtanding as M. de la Motte has a right to expect that we ſhould oppoſe him rather by reaſon than by authority.

What is a theatrical performance? The repreſentation of an action. Why of a ſingle action, and not of two or three? Doubtleſs, becauſe the human mind is incapable of embracing more than one object at a time; becauſe the intereſt, which is divided, is ſoon deſtroyed: becauſe we are diſguſted at ſeeing two different events even in a picture; it is, in ſhort, becauſe nature alone points out to us this precept, which is as invariable as herſelf.

For the ſame reaſon unity of place is eſſential; for a ſingle action cannot poſſibly happen in ſeveral places at a time: if the perſons of the drama are at Athens in the firſt act, how can they be at Perſia in the ſecond? Did Le Brun paint Alexander at Arbele and the Indies on the ſame canvas? ‘ I ſhould not be in the leaſt ſur-

'prized,' (ſays M. de la Motte, with all the ſmartneſs imaginable) 'to ſee a ſenſible people, 'not fond of rules, reconcile themſelves to the 'repreſentation of Coriolanus, condemned at 'Rome in the firſt act, received by the Volſci 'in the third, beſieging Rome in the fourth,' &c. But in the firſt place, I cannot conceive how a ſenſible and refined people can poſſibly be an enemy to rules; rules ſuggeſted by good ſenſe, and calculated for their pleaſures: and ſecondly, is it not evident, that in this caſe there would in fact be three diſtinct tragedies, and that ſuch a performance, however well executed, and put into the beſt poetry, would in effect be after all no more than a piece of Jodelle or Hardy's verſified by an ingenious modern?

The unity of time naturally follows the other two, of which this is, I think, an inconteſtible proof: I come to a tragedy, that is to ſay, to the repreſentation of an action; the ſubject is the accompliſhment of this ſingle action. A conſpiracy is formed againſt Auguſtus at Rome; I want to know what happens to Auguſtus and to the conſpirators. If the poet makes the action laſt fifteen days, he ought to give me an account of what paſſes during that time; I come there to be informed of every circumſtance, and nothing ſhould paſs that is uſeleſs. If he repreſents the events of fifteen days, there muſt be at leaſt fifteen different actions, however inconſiderable they may all be: it is no longer the accompliſhment of that ſingle action of the conſpiracy, towards which we are to proceed as ſpeedily as poſſible, but a long tedious hiſtory, which cannot be intereſting, becauſe it is not lively; becauſe the whole will be at too great a diſtance from the deciſive moment, from the cataſtrophe, which is the principal thing I am in expectation

expectation of. I don't go to the play to hear the hiſtory of a hero, but to ſee one ſingle event of his life, and there perhaps I meet with many. But further, the ſpectator is but three hours at the theatre, the action therefore ſhould laſt no longer than that time; Cinna, Andromache, Oedipus, Corneille's, la Motte's, and my own (if I may be permitted to mention it) are all within this rule. If ſome other pieces require more time, it is a licence, which can only be pardoned in favour of great beauties in the work, and the more this licence is indulged, the more faulty it becomes.

We often extend the unity of time to twenty-four hours, and the unity of place to the whole circumference of a palace. More ſeverity would prevent the handling ſome very fine ſubjects, and more indulgence would open the way to intolerable abuſes; for if it was once made an eſtabliſhed rule, that a theatric action might continue for two days, one author would ſoon extend it to two weeks, and another to two years; and in the ſame manner, if the place of the ſcene was not confined to certain limits, we ſhould ſoon ſee tragedies, like the old Julius Cæſar of the Engliſh, where Brutus and Caſſius are at Rome in the firſt act, and in Theſſaly in the fifth.

The obſervation of theſe rules ſerves not only to prevent faults, but it is likewiſe productive of true beauties, in the ſame manner as the rules of fine architecture well followed neceſſarily compoſe a building agreeable to the eye. We eaſily perceive, that by adhering to the unities of time, place, and action, the piece muſt be ſimple. It is this which conſtitutes the merit of all Racine's performances, and is that very perfection which Ariſtotle required. Mr. de la Motte,

in defending one of his own tragedies, prefers a multiplicity of events to this noble ſimplicity, and imagines the truth of his ſentiments confirmed by the little applauſe which Berenice met with, and the great character which the Cid bears to this day. Certain it is, that the Cid is much more affecting than Berenice; but Berenice is only contemptible, becauſe it is rather an elegy than a ſimple tragedy: and the Cid, the action of which is truly tragic, is not indebted for its ſucceſs to the multiplicity of events, but pleaſes in ſpite of that multiplicity; as it affects us in ſpite of the Infanta, and not becauſe of the Infanta.

Mr. de la Motte believes that we may be ſuperior to all theſe rules, by adhering ſolely to the unity of intereſt, which, he tells us, was invented by himſelf, and calls a paradox; but this unity of intereſt appears to me to be nothing more in reality than the unity of action. 'If 'many perſons (ſays he) are differently intereſted in the ſame event, and all of them ſuch 'characters as are worthy of my attention, there 'muſt be unity of action, and not unity of intereſt.' Since I took the liberty of differing with Mr. de la Motte on this ſubject, I have peruſed and re-conſidered Corneille's diſcourſe on the three unities. The reader had better conſult this great maſter than me. Obſerve how he expreſſes himſelf, 'It is my opinion, and I have 'already declared it, that the unity of action 'conſiſts in unity of plot, and unity of danger.' Whoever conſults this paſſage of Corneille will ſoon decide between Mr. de la Motte and me: and if the authority of this great man were not of itſelf ſufficient to confute my adverſary, have not I ſomething ſtill more convincing? namely, experience. In reading our beſt French tragedies,

dies, we ſhall always find the principal characters differently intereſted; but all theſe different intereſts tend towards that of the principal character, and thus conſtitute the unity of action. If, on the contrary, all theſe differents intereſts do not tend towards the principal, if they are not lines drawn to one common centre, the intereſt is then double, and what we call, the action, muſt be ſo likewiſe. Let us then, with the great Corneille, adhere to the three unities, in which we ſhall find all the other rules, that is to ſay, all other beauties, comprehended. Mr. de la Motte calls them the principles of fancy, and attempts to prove, that we may do without them in tragedy, becauſe we do ſo in our operas; which, in my opinion, is as abſurd, as to endeavour to correct a regular government by the example of an anarchy.

Of the Opera.

The opera is a ſpectacle as whimſical and abſurd as grand and magnificent, where the eye and ear receive more ſatisfaction than the mind; where its ſubjection to muſic makes the moſt ridiculous faults even neceſſary; where we are forced to ſing ballads at the deſtruction of a city, and dance round a tomb-ſtone; where we are preſented with the palaces of Pluto, and the ſun, gods, demons, magicians, ſigns and wonders, monſters, palaces built and pull'd down in the twinkling of an eye. We ſuffer theſe extravagancies, and are even fond of them, becauſe there we are in the land of fairies; and provided we have but fine ſights, good dancing and muſic, with a few intereſting ſcenes, we are very well ſatisfied. It would be as ridiculous to require the unities of time, place, and action in Alceſtes,

as

as to introduce dances and devils in Cinna or Rodogune. Notwithſtanding, however, that operas may diſpenſe with theſe rules, thoſe are ſtill the beſt where they are leaſt violated: in many, if I am not miſtaken, they are re-eſtabliſhed, ſo neceſſary and natural are they, and conducing ſo effectually to intereſt the ſpectator; how then can Mr. de la Motte reproach our nation with levity, for condemning in one entertainment the very things which we approve of in another? Every man muſt ſee the abſurdity of it. I expect, and with reaſon, more perfection in a tragedy than an opera; becauſe at a tragedy my attention is not divided; it is not on a ſaraband or a minuet that my pleaſure depends, my mind is to be filled, my ſoul is to be delighted. I wonder how the author could contrive to bring together in one place, and one day, the ſeveral parts of an event, which my mind can ſcarce conceive without labour, and where my heart becomes by degrees more and more intereſted. The more difficult this ſimplicity appears to me, the more it charms me; and when I want to account for this pleaſure, I find myſelf of Mr. Deſpreaux's opinion, who ſays,

Qu'en un lieu, qu'en un jour, un ſeul fait accompli
Tienne juſqu' à la fin le théatre rempli.*

I have beſides, he will ſay, the authority of the great Corneille: and I have ſtill more, I have his example, and the pleaſure which his works give

* Theſe lines are taken from Boileau's Art of Poetry.

'One place, one day, and one ſingle action, ſhould fill the ſtage 'from the beginning to the end of the repreſentation.'

give me, in proportion as he conforms more or leſs to this rule.

But Mr. de la Motte, not content with endeavouring to deprive the theatre of its eſtabliſhed laws, would even take away its poetry alſo, and give us tragedies in proſe.

Of Verses in Prose.

This ingenious and prolific author, who has done nothing all his life but write verſes, or proſe occaſioned by his verſes, writes againſt his own art, and treats it with the ſame contempt as he did Homer, whom, notwithſtanding, he took the pains to tranſlate. Never did Virgil, Taſſo, Deſpreaux, Racine, or Pope, think of writing againſt the harmony of verſe; nor Lully againſt muſic, or Newton againſt the mathematics. We have ſometimes ſeen men weak enough to think themſelves above their profeſſion, which is the ſure way to fall beneath it; but we have never ſeen any who were ſo ridiculous as to depreciate it. There are but too many who deſpiſe poetry, becauſe they know nothing of it. Paris is full of people, and even of men of ſenſe, born with organs utterly inſenſible of harmony, to whom muſic is nothing but noiſe, and poetry an ingenious folly. If theſe perſons are told, that a man of merit, who has writ five or ſix volumes of verſes, is of their opinion with regard to them, will they not think they have a right to look upon all other poets as fools, and this man as the only one who has recovered his ſenſes? It is therefore neceſſary to anſwer him for the honour of the art, and I will venture to add, for the honour of a country, which owes part of its reputation, among ſtrangers, to its perfection in that art.

Mr.

Mr. de la Motte has aſſerted, that rhime is a barbarous invention, of a very modern date. Notwithſtanding this, every nation in the univerſe, except the antient Greeks and Romans, have rhimed, and continue rhiming to this day. This return of the ſame ſounds to the ear is ſo natural to all mankind, that we find rhime practiſed among ſavages, as much as it is at Rome, Paris, London, and Madrid. Montagne has given us a tranſlation into French of a ſong, written in American rhime; and in one of Addiſon's Spectators we meet with a Lapland ode, the original of which is alſo in rhime, and which is full of fine ſentiments. The Greeks,

——————quibus dedit ore rotundo
Muſa loqui ——————

born in a happier climate, and bleſſed with more delicate organs than other nations, had a language, whoſe ſyllables, by their length or ſhortneſs, could exactly and properly expreſs every movement of the ſoul, whether ſlow or rapid. From that variety of intonations reſulted, both in their verſe and proſe, an harmonious ſweetneſs, which the antient Romans caught and imitated, and which, ſince them, no other nation hath been able to attain. But poetry, however, which Mr. de la Motte is ſo angry with, be it rhime or cadenc'd ſyllables, has always been, and always will continue to be, cultivated by all mankind.

Before the time of Herodotus, even hiſtory was always written in verſe among the Greeks, who derived this cuſtom from the antient Ægyptians, the wiſeſt, beſt policy'd, and moſt learned nation then upon earth. The practice, indeed, was very conſiſtent with reaſon: the chief end and deſign

of

of hiſtory being then no more than to tranſmit the memory of a few great men to poſterity, as examples for it: they never thought in thoſe times of giving the hiſtory of a convent, or a petty town, in folio volumes: they only wrote then what was worthy to be read, and fit to be got by heart; and therefore availed themſelves of the harmony of verſe to aſſiſt the memory; for this reaſon the firſt philoſophers, legiſlators, founders of religious ſects, and hiſtorians, were all poets.

It may be objected, that poetry, on ſuch ſubjects, muſt be deficient, either in harmony or preciſion; but as we know that Virgil united theſe excellencies, however ſeemingly incompatible, and that Deſpreaux and Racine have written like Virgil; how can a man, who has read them all three, and knows they have been tranſlated into almoſt every language in Europe, depreciate in this manner a talent, which has reflected ſo much honour even on himſelf? I place Deſpreaux and Racine on a level with Virgil, with regard to the merit of verſification; becauſe, if the author of the Æneid had been born at Paris, he would have wrote in rhime as they did: and if theſe two illuſtrious Frenchmen had lived in the time of Auguſtus, they would have made the ſame uſe which Virgil did of the Latin meaſure. When M. de la Motte therefore calls verſification a mechanical and ridiculous labour, he condemns not only all our own great poets, but all the poets of antiquity alſo. Virgil and Horace ſubmitted to this mechanical labour, as well as modern writers: a happy arrangement of dactyles and ſpondees was as much trouble to them, as our rhymes and hemiſtics are to us, and the taſk, no doubt, muſt have been laborious, ſince we find the Æneid,

after

after eleven years toil, was not even then brought to perfection.

Mr. de la Motte affirms, that, at leaſt, a tragedy put into proſe will loſe no part of its ſtrength or beauty. To prove this, he has himſelf proſified the firſt ſcene of Mithridates, and nobody can bear to read it: he does not conſider, that the true merit of verſe is to be as natural and correct as proſe: it is the ſurmounting this great difficulty, that gives every good judge ſuch exquiſite pleaſure; but reduce them to proſe, and there is no longer any merit or any ſatisfaction in them. But our neighbours, ſays he, never write tragedies in rhime: true; but they are notwithſtanding in verſe, becauſe harmony is agreeable to every nation. It only remains then to determine, whether our verſes ſhould be in rhime or not. Corneille and Racine wrote in rhime. If we are deſirous of ſtriking into a new path, it is not ſo much perhaps from our love of novelty, as becauſe we find ourſelves unable to keep up with theſe great men in the old one. The Engliſh and Italians may do without rhime, as their language has more variety, and their poetry a thouſand more liberties than ours. The genius and power of every language is determined by the peculiar conſtruction of its phraſes, the number of its vowels and conſonants, its inverſions, its auxiliary verbs, &c. Elegance and perſpicuity are the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtics of the French tongue; we allow no licence to our poetry, which is obliged, like our proſe, to follow the preciſe order of our ideas; we are therefore under the abſolute neceſſity of employing the repetition of the ſame ſounds, to prevent our poetry being confounded with our proſe. The following verſes are well known.

Où

Où me cacher? fuyons dans la nuit infernale.
Mais que dis je? mon pere y tient l'urne fatale:
Le ſort, dit on, l'a miſe en ſes ſévères mains;
Minos juge aux enfers les pales humains.

But if we read them thus,

Où me cacher? fuyons dans la nuit infernale.
Mais que dis-je? mon pere y tient l'urne funeſte:
Le ſort, dit on, l'a miſe en ſes ſeveres mains;
Minos juge aux enfers tous les pâles mortels.

How poetical ſoever this may be, will it give us the ſame pleaſure when thus put out of rhime? The Engliſh and Italians would ſay, after the Greeks and Romans,

Pale mortals Minos in the ſhades doth judge;

Or perhaps run the ſenſe gracefully into the next verſe. Add to this, that their manner of repeating verſes expreſſes the long or ſhort ſyllables, and thus preſerves the harmony without the aſſiſtance of rhime; but why ſhould we, who have none of theſe advantages, part from thoſe few, which the nature of our language has beſtowed upon us?

M. de la Motte compares our poets, that is to ſay, Corneille, Racine and Deſpreaux, to the makers of acroſtics, and to a mountebank that draws millet through the eye of a needle; and adds, that all theſe puerilities have no merit, but what ariſes from the difficulty that attends the performance of them. I acknowledge that bad verſes

verſes are nothing more than this; they only differ from bad proſe in the rhime, and rhime alone can never conſtitute the merit of the poet, nor the pleaſure of the reader. It is not the dactyles and ſpondees of Virgil and Homer that delight us; it is the enchanting harmony, which ariſes from the perfection of this very difficult meaſure. He, who endeavours to overcome a difficulty, merely to have the merit of overcoming it, is a fool; but he that can draw forth, even from theſe very obſtacles, beauties, that will pleaſe univerſally, muſt be a wiſe and ſenſible man, and indeed almoſt ſingular. It is a very arduous taſk to make good pictures, good ſtatues, good muſic, or good verſes; and the names of thoſe illuſtrious men, therefore, who have been able to perform this taſk, will remain, perhaps, much longer than the kingdoms where they were born.

I might take this opportunity of diſputing with Mr. de la Motte with relation to ſome other points; but this might carry with it the air of a perſonal attack upon him, and lay me open to the ſuſpicion of malignity, which I am as far from entertaining, as I am from adopting his ſentiments. I had much rather avail myſelf of the many fine and judicious reflections ſcattered over his works, than engage in the refutation of ſome of them, which appeared to me more controvertible than others. I am ſatisfied with endeavouring to defend an art which I love, and which he himſelf ought to have defended.

I will only add a word (with leave of Mr. de la Faye) concerning the ode in favour of harmony, where that gentleman attacks Mr. de la Motte's ſyſtem in ſome very fine verſes, which are anſwered by him in proſe. In the following ſtanzas Mr. de la Faye has collected almoſt all the

arguments,

arguments, which I have here made uſe of, with great force of imagination, and in charming poetry :

Rules ſeem ſevere, and yet are but the art
To pleaſe, and ſink ſtill deeper in the heart;
By rigid laws reſtrain'd, the poet's mind
Springs with more active force as more confin'd;
So waters preſs'd in narrow fountains, riſe,
Play in the air, and ſeem to touch the ſkies.

I never met with a compariſon more juſt, more elegant, or better expreſſed. Mr. de la Motte, who ſhould have anſwered theſe verſes by imitating them, ſets himſelf about examining, whether the pipes are the cauſe of the waters riſing, or whether it is the heighth from whence it falls that determines the degree of its elevation. Beſides (ſays he) 'where ſhall we find in verſe, more 'than in proſe, this extraordinary depth of 'thought, &c.'

I am afraid Mr. de la Motte is miſtaken, conſidered in the light of a philoſopher, becauſe it is certain, that without that conſtraint of the water from the pipes, it would never riſe at all, from whatever heighth it fell. But is he not ſtill more miſtaken as a poet? How came he not to perceive, that as the reſtriction of the meaſure of verſes produces a harmony agreeable to the ear, ſo does that narrow receptacle which confines the water produce a jet-d'eau that is pleaſing to the ſight. Is not the compariſon equally juſt and beautiful? Mr. de la Faye, I own, has confuted la Motte in a much better manner than myſelf; he followed the example of the philoſopher, who

anſwered

anſwered the ſophiſt, that denied there was any ſuch thing as motion, only by walking before him. Mr. de la Motte denies the harmony of verſes; Mr. de la Faye ſends him ſome verſes full of harmony: this alone ſhould teach me alſo to put an end to my proſe.

DRAMATIS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

OEDIPUS, King of Thebes.
JOCASTA, Queen of Thebes.
PHILOCTETES, Prince of Eubæa.
HIGH-PRIEST.
ARSAPES, Confident of Oedipus.
EGINA, Confidente of Jocasta.
DIMAS, Friend of Philoctetes.
PHORBAS, an old Man of Thebes.
ICARUS, an old Man of Corinth.

CHORUS of THEBANS.

SCENE THEBES.

OEDIPUS.

OEDIPUS,

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

PHILOCTETES, DIMAS.

Dim. IS it my friend, my Philoctetes? Whence
And wherefore com'ſt thou to diſtemper'd Thebes
In ſearch of death, to brave the wrath of heaven?
For, know, the gods on this devoted land
Wreak their full vengeance. mortals dare not tread
The guilty ſoil, to death and horror long
Conſign'd, and from the living world cut off:
Away; be gone.

Phil. It ſuits a wretch like me:
Leave me, my friend, to my unhappy fate;
And only tell me, if the wrath divine
Hath, in its rapid progreſs, ſpar'd the queen.

Dim. Jocaſta lives; but round her throne ſtill ſpreads
The dire contagion; ev'ry fatal moment
Deprives her of ſome faithful ſubject: death

Steals

Steals closer by degrees, and seems to threat
Her sacred life. But heav'n, we trust, will soon
Withdraw its vengeful arm: such scenes of blood
Will sure appease its rage.
Phil. What horrid crime
Cou'd bring down so severe a punishment?
Dim. Since the king's death——
Phil. The king! ha! Laius—
Dim. Dy'd
Some four years since.
Phil. Ha! Laius dead! indeed!
What sweet seducing hope awakes my soul?
Jocasta! will the gods at length be kind?
May Philoctetes still be thine? But say,
Dimas, how fell the king?
Dim. 'Tis four years since;
For the last time towards Bæotia, led
By fate, you came; scarce had you bent your way
To Asia, e'er th' unhappy Laius fell
By some base hand.
Phil. Assassinated, say'st thou?
Dim. This was the cause, the source of all our ills,
The ruin of this wretched country: shock'd
At the sad stroke, we wept the gen'ral loss,
When lo! the minister of wrath divine,
(Fatal to innocence, and fav'ring long
Unpunish'd guilt) a dreadful monster came,
(O Philoctetes, wou'd thou had'st been here!)
And ravag'd all our borders, horrid form!
Made for destruction by avenging heav'n,
With human voice, an eagle, woman, lion,
Unnat'ral mixture! rage with cunning join'd
United to destroy us: nought remain'd
To save but this alone; in phrase obscure
The monster had proposed t'affrighted Thebes
A strange ænigma, which who could unfold
Shou'd save his country; if he fail'd, must dye.
Reluctant we obey'd the hard decree.
Instant the gen'ral voice aloud proclaim'd
The kingdom his reward, who, by the gods
Inspir'd, shou'd first unveil the mystery.

The aged and the wiſe, by hope miſled,
With fruitleſs ſcience brav'd the monſter's rage;
Vain knowledge all! all try'd, and trying fell,
Till Oedipus, the heir to Corinth's throne,
Endow'd with wiſdom far above his years,
Fearleſs, and led by fortune, came, beheld,
Unfolded all, and took the great reward;
Lives ſtill, and reigns o'er Thebes; but reigns, alas!
O'er dying ſubjects, and a deſert land.
Vainly we hoped to ſee the wayward fates
Chain'd to his throne, and yielding to the hand
Of Oedipus, our great deliverer.
A little time the gods propitious ſmiled,
And bleſs'd us with a gleam of tranſient peace;
But barrenneſs and famine ſoon deſtroy'd
Our airy hopes: ills heaped on ills ſucceed,
A dreadful plague unpeoples half the realms
Of ſickly Thebes, ſnatching the poor remains
Juſt 'ſcap'd from famine and the grave: high heav'n
Hath thus ordain'd, and ſuch our hapleſs fate.
But ſay, illuſtrious hero, whom the gods
Have long approv'd, ſay, wherefore haſt thou left
The paths of glory, and the ſmiles of fortune,
To ſeek the regions of affliction here?

Phil. I come to join my ſorrows and my tears,
For know the world with me hath loſt its beſt
And nobleſt friend: ne'er ſhall theſe eyes behold
The offſpring of the gods, like them unconquer'd,
Earth's beſt ſupport, the guardian deity
Of innocence oppreſs'd: I mourn a friend,
The world a father.

Dim. Is Alcides dead?

Phil. Theſe hands perform'd the melancholy office,
Laid on his fun'ral pile the firſt of men;
Th' all-conquering arrows, thoſe dear dreadful gifts
The ſon of Jove bequeath'd me, have I brought,
With his cold aſhes, here, where I will raiſe
A tomb and altars to my valued friend.
O! had he liv'd! had but indulgent heav'n,
In pity to mankind, prolong'd his days,
Far from Jocaſta I had ſtill remain'd;

And, tho' I might have cheriſh'd ſtill my vain
And hopeleſs paſſion, had not wander'd here,
Or left Alcides for a woman's love.
Dim. Oft have I pity'd the unhappy flame,
Caught in the earlieſt youth, increaſing ſtill
And growing with thy growth: Jocaſta, forc'd
By a hard father to a hateful bed,
Unwillingly partook the throne of Laius.
Alas! what tears thoſe fatal nuptials coſt,
What ſorrows have they brought on wretched Thebes!
How have I oft admir'd thy noble ſoul,
Worthy of empire! conqu'ror o'er thyſelf:
There firſt the hero ſhone, repreſs'd his paſſion,
And the firſt tyrant he ſubdued was love.
Phil. There we muſt fly to conquer; I confeſs it;
Long time I ſtrove, I felt my weakneſs long;
At length reſolv'd to ſhun the fatal place,
I took a laſt farewel of my Jocaſta.
The world then trembled at Alcides' name,
And on his valour did ſuſpend their fate;
I join'd the god-like man, partook his toils,
March'd by his ſide, and twin'd his laurel wreath
Round my own brows: then my enlighten'd ſoul
Againſt the paſſions arm'd, and roſe ſuperior.
A great man's friendſhip is the gift of heav'n.
In him I read my duty and my fate;
I bound myſelf to virtue and to him:
My valour ſtrengthen'd, and my heart improv'd,
Not hardened, I became like my Alcides.
What had I been without him! a king's ſon,
A common prince, the ſlave of ev'ry paſſion,
Which Hercules hath taught me to ſubdue.
Dim. Now then unmov'd thou can'ſt behold Jocaſta,
And her new huſband.
Phil. Ha! another huſband!
Said'ſt thou, another?
Dim. Oedipus hath join'd
To her's his future fate.
Phil. He is too happy;
But he is worthy: he who ſav'd a kingdom
Alone can merit her, and heav'n is juſt.

Dim.

Dim. He comes, and with him his aſſembled people;
Lo! the high-prieſt attends: this way they bend,
To deprecate the wrath of angry heav'n.
Phil. It melts my ſoul; I weep for their misfortunes.
O Hercules, from thy eternal ſeat
Look down on thy afflicted country! hear
Thy fellow citizens! O hear thy friend,
Who joins his pray'rs, and be their guardian god!

SCENE III.

HIGH-PRIEST, CHORUS.

FIRST PERSON OF THE CHORUS.

Ye blaſting pow'rs, who waſte this wretched empire,
And breath contagion, death, and horrors round us,
O quicken your ſlow wrath, be kind at laſt,
And urge our ling'ring fate.

SECOND PERSON OF THE CHORUS.

Strike, ſtrike, ye gods,
Your victims are prepar'd; ye mountains, fall!
Cruſh us, ye heav'ns! O death, deliver us,
And we ſhall thank you for the boon.
High-p. No more;
Ceaſe your loud plaints, the wretch's poor reſource;
Yield to the pow'r ſupreme, who means to try
His people by affliction; with a word
He can deſtroy, and with a word can ſave:
He knows that death is here; the cries of Thebes
Have reach'd his throne. Behold! the King approaches,
And heav'n by me declares its will divine;
The fates will ſoon to Oedipus unveil
Their myſt'ries all, and happier days ſucceed.

SCENE III.

OEDIPUS, JOCASTA, HIGH-PRIEST, EGINA, DIMAS, ARASPES, CHORUS.

Oed. O ye, who to this hallow'd temple bring
The mournful off'ring of your tears; O what,
What ſhall I ſay to my afflicted people?
Wou'd I cou'd turn the wrath of angry heav'n
Againſt myſelf, and quench the deadly flame!
But O! in univerſal ills like theſe,
Kings are but men, and only can partake
The common danger. Say, thou miniſter
Of the juſt gods, ſay, do they ſtill refuſe
To hear the voice of mis'ry; ſtill relentleſs
Will they behold us periſh, are they deaf
And ſilent ſtill?

High-p. King, people, liſten all:
This night did I behold the flame of heav'n
Deſcending on our altars; to my eyes
The ghaſtly ſhade of Laius then appear'd,
Indignant frown'd upon me, and thus ſpoke
In fearful accents, terrible to hear:
" The death of Laius is ſtill unreveng'd,
" The murth'rer lives in Thebes, and doth infect
" The wholeſome air with his malignant breath;
" He muſt be known, he muſt be puniſhed,
" And on his fate depends the people's ſafety."

Oed. Juſtly ye ſuffer, Thebans, for this crime;
Laius was once your lov'd and honour'd king,
And your neglect hath from his manes drawn
This vengeance on you. Such is oft the fate
Of the beſt ſov'reigns; whilſt they live, reſpect
Waits on their laws, their juſtice is admir'd,
And they like gods are ſerv'd, like gods ador'd;
But after death they ſink into oblivion.
No longer then your flatt'ring incenſe burns:
The ſervile mind of wretched man ſtill bends

To

To int'reſt; and when virtue is departed,
'Tis ſoon forgotten: therefore doth the blood
Of murther'd Laius now cry out againſt you,
And ſues for vengeance to offended heav'n.
To ſprinkle on his tomb the murth'rer's blood
Will better far than ſlaughter'd hecatombs
Appeaſe his ſpirit: be it all our care
To ſeek the guilty wretch. Can none remember
Aught touching this ſad deed? Amidſt your ſigns
And wonders, cou'd no footſteps e'er be trac'd
Of this unpuniſh'd crime? They always told me
It was a Theban, who againſt his prince
Uplifted his rebellious hand. For me [*To Jocaſta.*
Who from thy hands receiv'd the crown, two years
After the death of Laius did I mount
The throne of Thebes, and never ſince that hour
Wou'd I recal the ſubject of thy tears,
But in reſpectful ſilence waited ſtill;
Still have thy dangers buſy'd all my ſoul,
Nor left me time to think on aught but thee.

Joc. When fate, which had reſerv'd me for thy arms,
Depriv'd me of my late unhappy lord,
Who, journeying o'er his kingdom's frontiers, fell
By baſe aſſaſſins, Phorbas then alone
Attended him, his lov'd and valued friend;
To whom the king, relying on his wiſdom,
Entruſted half his pow'r: he brought to Thebes
The mangled corſe: himſelf half dead with wounds,
And bath'd in blood, fell at Jocaſta's feet;
" Villains unknown (he cry'd) have ſlain the king;
" Theſe eyes beheld it: I was dying too,
" But heaven hath reſtor'd me to prolong
" A wretched life." He ſaid no more. My ſoul
Diſtracted ſaw the melancholy truth
Was ſtill conceal'd; and therefore heav'n perhaps
Conceal'd the murth'rer too; perhaps accompliſh'd
Its own eternal will, and made us guilty,
That it might puniſh. Soon the ſphinx appear'd,
And laid our country waſte: then hapleſs Thebes,
Attentive to her ſafety, cou'd not think
On Laius' fate, whilſt trembling for her own.

Oed. Where is that faithful Phorbas; lives he ſtill?

Joc. Alas! his zeal and ſervice ill repaid,
Too pow'rful to be lov'd, the jealous ſtate
His ſecret foe, nobles and people join'd
To puniſh him for paſt felicity.
The multitude accus'd him, ev'n demanded
Of me his death: ſore preſs'd on ev'ry ſide,
I knew not how to pardon or condemn,
But to a neighbouring caſtle I convey'd him,
And hid the guiltleſs victim from their rage.
There four long winters hath the poor old man,
To future favorites a ſad example,
Without a murmur or complaint remain'd,
And hopes from innocence alone releaſe.

Oed. It is enough, Jocaſta. Fly, begone,
[*To his ſervants.*
Open the priſon, bring him hither ſtrait,
We will examine him before you all;
Laius and Thebes ſhall be aveng'd together:
Yes, we will hear and judge, will ſound the depth
Of this ſtrange myſtery. Ye gods of Thebes,
Who hear our pray'rs, and know the murth'rer, now
Reveal, and puniſh; and thou, Sun, with-hold
From his dark eyes thy bleſſed light! proſcrib'd,
Abandon'd, let him wander o'er the earth
A wretched miſcreant, by his ſons abhorr'd,
And to his mother horrible! depriv'd
Of burial, let his body be the prey
Of hungry vultures!

High-p. In theſe execrations
We all unite.

Oed. Gods! let the guilty ſuffer,
And they alone! or if the high decrees
Of your eternal juſtice leave to me
His puniſhment, at leaſt indulgent grant,
Where you command, the power to obey;
If you purſue the guilty, O complete
The glorious work, and make the victim known!
[*To the people.*
Return, my people, to the temple; there
Once more entreat the gods: perhaps your pray'rs

May

May from their heav'nly manſions draw them down
To dwell amongſt us: if they lov'd the king,
They will avenge his death, and kind to him
Who errs unknowing, will direct this arm
For juſtice rais'd, and teach me where to ſtrike.

The End of the First Act.

ACT II. SCENE I.

JOCASTA, EGINA, ARASPES, CHORUS.

Aras. BELIEVE me, 'tis too true, my royal miſtreſs,
Your dying people, with one common voice,
Accuſe the hapleſs Philoctetes: fate
Hath ſent him back to ſave this wretched kingdom.
Joc. What do I hear, ye pow'rs?
Egi. 'Tis wonderful.
Joc. Who? Philoctetes?
Aras. Yes, it muſt be he:
To whom can we impute it but to him?
When laſt at Thebes, he ſeem'd to meditate
A deed like this; for much he hated Laius:
From Oedipus his trait'rous purpoſe ſcarce
Cou'd he conceal; for ſoon unwary youth
Betrays itſelf: ſoon thro' the thin diſguiſe
Of ill diſſembled loyalty, we ſaw
The rancour of his heart. I know not what
Provok'd him, but too warm and open, ever
The ſlave of paſſion, he wou'd kindle oft
At the king's name, and often pour forth threats
Of vengeance: for ſome time he left the kingdom,
But fate ſoon brought the reſtleſs wand'rer back;
And at that fatal time, which heav'n diſtinguiſh'd

By the deteſted ſhocking parricide,
He was at Thebes: e'er ſince that dreadful hour,
Suſpicion juſtly falls on Philoctetes:
But the high name which he had gain'd in war,
His boaſted title of earth's great avenger,
And his heroic deeds, have ſtopp'd the tongue
Of clamour, and ſuſpended yet the ſtroke
Of our reſentment. Now the time is come
When Thebes ſhall think no more of vain reſpect;
His glory and his conqueſts plead no more;
The hearts of an oppreſſed people groan;
The gods require his blood, and muſt be heard.

Chor. O queen! have pity on a wretched people,
Who love and honour thee, revere the gods,
And follow their example; yield up to us
Their victim, and preſent our vows to heav'n;
For heav'n will hear them, if they come from thee.

Joc. O! if my life can mitigate its wrath,
I give it freely; take the ſacrifice;
Accept my blood; but O! demand no more.
Thebans, be gone.

SCENE II.

JOCASTA, EGINA.

Egi. How I lament thy fate!

Joc. Alas! I envy thoſe whom death has freed
From all their cares: but what remains for me,
What pain and torment to a virtuous heart!

Egi. 'Tis terrible indeed: the clam'rous people,
Warm'd with falſe zeal, will cry aloud for vengeance,
And ſoon demand their victim. I forbear
T'accuſe him; but if he at laſt ſhou'd prove
The murtherer of thy unhappy lord,
How it muſt ſhock thy ſoul!

Joc. Impoſſible!
Such guilt and baſeneſs never dwelt in him.
O my Egina! ſince our bonds of love

Were

Were diſunited, nought has pierc'd my heart
Like this ſuſpicion: this alone was wanting
To make Jocaſta moſt completely wretched:
But I'll not bear to hear him thus accus'd;
I lov'd him, and he muſt be innocent.

Egi. That conſtant love.——

Joc. Nay think not that my heart
Still nouriſhes a guilty paſſion for him;
I conquer'd that long ſince; yet, dear Egina,
Howe'er the ſoul may act which virtue guides,
Its ſecret motions, nature's children ſtill
Muſt force their way: they will not be ſubdu'd,
But in the folds and windings of the heart,
Lurk ſtill, and ruſh upon us; hid in fires
We thought extinguiſh'd, from their aſhes riſe:
In the hard conflict, rigid virtue may
Reſiſt the paſſions, but can ne'er deſtroy them.

Egi. How juſt, and yet how noble is thy grief;
Such ſentiments!——

Joc. Jocaſta is moſt wretched;
Thou know'ſt my mis'ries, and thou know'ſt my heart,
Egina: twice hath Hymen lit his torch
For me, and twice hath chang'd my ſlavery,
For ſuch it was; the only man I lov'd,
Torn from my arms. Forgive me, ye juſt gods,
The ſad remembrance of a conquer'd paſſion.
Egina, thou wert witneſs of our loves,
Thoſe ties, alas! diſſolv'd as ſoon as made:
Then Oedipus, my ſovereign, ſought and gain'd me,
Spite of myſelf. I took the diadem,
Begirt with ſorrows. To forget the paſt
Became my duty then, and I obey'd.
Thou know'ſt I ſtifled ev'ry tender thought
Of my firſt love, diſguis'd an aching heart,
Drank up my tears, and even from myſelf
Strove to conceal my griefs.

Egi. How cou'd you venture
The dang'rous trial of a ſecond marriage?

Joc. Alas!

Egi. Will you forgive me? ſhall I ſpeak?

Joc. Thou may'ſt.

Egi. The king, the conqueror ſubdu'd thee:
You gave your hand as a reward to him,
Who ſav'd your country.
Joc. Gracious gods!
Egi. Was he
Happier than Laius? Was your Philoctetes
Forgotten then, or did they ſhare your heart?
Joc. Thebes, by a cruel monſter then laid waſte,
Had promis'd its deliverer my hand;
The conqu'ror of the ſphinx was worthy of me.
Egi. You lov'd him then?
Joc. I felt ſome tenderneſs
For Oedipus; but O! 'twas far from love:
'Twas not, Egina, that tumultuous paſſion,
Th' impetuous offspring of my raviſh'd ſenſes,
Not the fierce flame that burn'd for Philoctetes;
Who, by his fatal charms, ſubdu'd my reaſon,
And pour'd love's ſweeteſt poiſon o'er my heart:
Friendſhip ſincere was all I cou'd beſtow
On Oedipus, for much I priz'd his virtue;
And pleas'd, beheld him mount the throne of Thebes
Which he had ſav'd; but, whilſt I follow'd him,
Ev'n at the altar, my affrighted ſoul,
Wherefore I knew not, was moſt ſtrangely mov'd,
And I retir'd with horror to his arms.
To this a dreadful omen did ſucceed:
Methought, Egina, in the dead of night,
I ſaw the gulph of hell yawn wide before me;
When lo! the ſpirit of my murther'd Lord,
Bloody and pale, with threat'ning aſpect ſtood,
And pointed to my ſon; that ſon, Egina,
Which I to Laius bore, and to the gods
Offer'd, a cruel pious ſacrifice.
They beckon'd me to follow them, and ſeem'd
To drag me with them to the horrid gloom
Of Tartarus: my troubled ſoul long kept
The ſad idea, and muſt keep it ever.
Now Philoctetes doubles ev'ry woe.
Egi. I heard a noiſe that way, and, ſee he comes.
Joc. 'Tis he; I tremble: but I will avoid him.

SCENE

SCENE III.

JOCASTA, PHILOCTETES.

Phil. Do not avoid me, do not fly, Jocaſta,
From Philoctetes; turn, and look upon me:
O! ſpeak to me, nor fear my jealous tears
Shou'd interrupt the new-born happineſs
Of thy late nuptials: think not that I came
To caſt reproaches on thee, or with ſighs
To win thy loſt affection: vulgar arts,
Unworthy of us both! the heart, Jocaſta,
That burn'd for thee, and if I may recal
Thy plighted faith, was once not hateful to thee,
Has learn'd, from thy example, not to feel
Weakneſs like that.

Joc. I muſt approve thy conduct,
And 'tis but fit I vindicate my own:
I lov'd thee, Philoctetes; but my fate
Tore me from thee, and gave me to another.
Thou know'ſt what woes the horrid ſphinx, by heav'n
Appointed to afflict us, brought on Thebes:
Too well thou know'ſt that Oedipus——

Phil. Is thine;
I know it, and is worthy of the bleſſing:
Young as he was, his wiſdom ſav'd thy country;
His virtues, his fair deeds, and what ſtill more
Exalted him, Jocaſta's love, have rank'd
Thy Oedipus among the firſt of men.
Wherefore did cruel fortune, ſtill reſolv'd
To puniſh Philoctetes, drive me hence,
To ſeek vain trophies in a diſtant land?
O! if the conqu'ror of the ſphinx was doom'd
To conquer thee, why was not I at Thebes?
I'd not have labour'd in the fruitleſs ſearch
Of idle myſt'ries, wrapp'd in words of darkneſs;
This arm, to conqueſt long beneath thy ſmiles
Accuſtom'd, ſhould have drawn the vengeful ſword,

And

And laid the howling monſter at thy feet.
But O! a happier arm has wreſted from me
That nobleſt triumph, and deſerv'd Jocaſta.
Joc. Alas! thou know'ſt not yet what ills await thee.
Phil. Thee and Alcides I have loſt already:
Is there aught more to fear?
Joc. Thou dwell'ſt at Thebes,
The deteſtation of avenging gods;
The baneful peſtilence ſtalks forth amongſt us;
The blood of Laius cries aloud, and heav'n
Purſues us ſtill: the murtherer muſt bleed;
He has been ſought for; ſome have dar'd to ſay
That he is found, and call him Philoctetes.
Phil. Aſtoniſhment! the baſe ſuſpicion ſhocks
My ſoul, and bids my tongue be ſilent ever
On the opprobrious theme: accus'd of murther!
Murth'ring thy huſband! thou can'ſt ne'er believe it.
Joc. O! never! 'twere injurious to thy honour
To combat ſuch impoſture, or refute
The vile aſperſion: no, thou know'ſt my heart,
Thou had'ſt my love, and coud'ſt not do a deed
Unworthy of it. Let them periſh all,
Theſe worthleſs Thebans, who deſerve their fate
For thus ſuſpecting thee: but, hence! begone!
Our vows are fruitleſs: heav'n reſerves for thee
Superior bleſſings. Thou wert born to ſerve
The gods, whoſe wiſdom wou'd not bury here
Virtues like thine, or ſuffer love to rule
A heart deſign'd for univerſal ſway,
And courage fit to ſave and bleſs mankind.
Ill wou'd it ſuit the follower of Alcides
To loſe his moments in the fond concerns,
The little cares of love. Thy hours are due
To the unhappy and the injur'd: they
Will all thy time, and all thy virtue claim.
Already tyrants throng on ev'ry ſide;
Alcides dead, new monſters riſe; go, thou,
And give the world another Hercules,
Oedipus comes; permit me to retire;
Not that I fear the weakneſs of my heart,

But as Jocaſta lov'd thee once, and he
Is now my huſband, I ſhou'd bluſh before you.

SCENE IV.

OEDIPUS, PHILOCTETES, ARASPES.

Oed. Say'ſt thou, Araſpes, is he here, the prince,
The noble Philoctetes?
Phil. Yes, 'tis he;
Led by blind fortune to this hapleſs clime,
Where angry heav'n hath made me ſuffer wrongs
I am not us'd to bear. I know the crimes
Laid to my charge; but think not that I mean
To juſtify myſelf: too well I know thee
To think that Oedipus wou'd ever ſtoop
To ſuch low mean ſuſpicions: no! thy fame
Is mix'd with mine, in the ſame ſteps of honour
We trod together. Theſeus, Hercules,
And Philoctetes, pointed out to thee
The paths of glory; do not then diſgrace
Their names, and taint thy own, by calumny,
But keep their bright examples ſtill before thee.
Oed. All that I wiſh is but to ſave my country,
And if I can be uſeful to mankind,
This is th' ambition I wou'd ſatisfy,
And this the leſſon which thoſe heroes taught,
Whom thou haſt follow'd and whom I admire.
I meant not to accuſe thee: had I choſe
The people's victim, it had been myſelf.
I think it but the duty of a king
To periſh for his country: 'tis an honour
Too great for common men. Then had I ſav'd
Once more my Thebans, yielded up my life,
And ſhelter'd thine: but 'twas not in my pow'r.
The blood of guilt muſt flow, thou ſtand'ſt accuſed.
Defend thyſelf: if thou art innocent,
None ſhall rejoice ſo much as Oedipus;

Nor

Nor as a criminal ſhall then receive thee,
But as my noble friend, as Philoctetes.

Phil. I thought myſelf, indeed, above ſuſpicion:
From many a baſe aſſaſſin has this arm,
While Jove's dread thunder ſlept, reliev'd mankind.
Whom we chaſtiſe, we ſeldom imitate.

Oed. I do not think thou would'ſt diſgrace thy name,
And thy fair martial deeds, by ſuch a crime.
If Laius fell by thee, he fell with honour,
I doubt it not, for I muſt do thee juſtice.

Phil. If I had ſlain him, I had only gain'd
One added triumph. Kings, indeed, are gods
To their own ſubjects, but to Hercules,
Or me, they were no more than common men.
I have aveng'd the wrongs of mighty princes;
And, therefore, little, thou may'ſt think, ſhou'd fear
T' attack the braveſt.

Oed. Heroes, like thyſelf,
Are equal ev'n to kings, I know they are:
But ſtill remember, prince, whoe'er ſlew Laius,
His head muſt anſwer for the woes of Thebes;
And thou——

Phil. I ſlew him not; let that ſuffice.
If I had done the deed, I wou'd have own'd,
Nay boaſted of it. Hear me, Oedipus:
Though vulgar ſouls, by vulgar methods, deign
To vindicate their injur'd honour; kings
And heroes, when they ſpeak, expect, no doubt,
To be believ'd: perhaps thou doſt ſuſpect
I murther'd Laius. It becomes not thee,
Of all men, to accuſe me: to thy hand
Devolv'd his ſceptre and his queen. Who reap'd
The fruits of Laius's death, but Oedipus?
Who took the ſpoils? Who fill'd his throne? Not I:
That object never tempted Philoctetes:
Alcides never wou'd accept a crown:
We knew no maſter, and deſir'd no ſubjects:
I have made kings, but never wiſh'd to be one.
But 'tis beneath me to refute the falſehood,
For innocence is leſſen'd by defence.

Oed.

Oed. Thy pride offends me, whilſt thy virtue charms.
If thou art guiltleſs, thou haſt nought to fear
From juſtice and the laws; thy innocence
Will ſhine with double ſplendor: dwell with us,
And wait th' event.

Phil. My honour is concern'd,
And therefore I ſhall ſtay; nor hence depart
Till I have ample vengeance for the wrongs
Thy baſe ſuſpicions caſt on Philoctetes.

SCENE V.

OEDIPUS, ARASPES.

Oed. Araſpes, I can never think him guilty:
A heart like his, intrepid, brave, and fearleſs,
Cou'd never ſtoop to mean diſguiſe; nor thoughts
So noble e'er inſpire the timid breaſt
Of falſehood: no! ſuch baſeneſs is far from him:
I even bluſh'd t'accuſe him, and condemn'd
My own injuſtice: hard and cruel fate
Of royalty! alas! kings cannot read
The hearts of men, and oft on innocence,
Spite of ourſelves unjuſt, inflict the pains
Due to the guilty. How this Phorbas lingers!
In him alone are all my hopes: the gods
Refuſe to hear or anſwer to our vows;
Their ſilence ſhews how much they are offended.

Araſ. Rely then on thyſelf: the gods whoſe aid
This prieſt hath promis'd, do not always dwell
Within their temples; tripods, caves, and cells,
The brazen mouths that pour forth oracles,
Which men had fram'd, by men may be inſpir'd;
We muſt not reſt our faith on prieſts alone;
Ev'n in the ſanctuary traitors oft
May lurk unſeen, exert their pious arts
T'enſlave mankind, and bid the deſtinies
Speak or be ſilent juſt as they command them.
Search then, and find the truth, examine all;

Phorbas,

Phorbas, and Philoctetes, and Jocaſta.
Truſt to yourſelf; let our own eyes determine;
Be they our tripods, oracles, and gods.
Oed. Within the temple, think'ſt thou, perfidy
Like this can dwell: but if juſt heav'n at laſt
Shou'd fix our fate, and Oedipus be call'd
To execute its will, he will receive
The precious truſt, the ſafety of his country,
Nor act unworthy of it. To the gods
Once more I go, and with inceſſant pray'r
Will try to ſooth their anger: thou, mean time,
If thou would'ſt wiſh to ſerve me, haſten onward
The ling'ring Phorbas; in our hapleſs ſtate,
I muſt inquire the truth of gods and men.

The END of the SECOND ACT.

ACT III. SCENE I.

JOCASTA, EGINA.

Joc. YES, my Egina, I expect him here;
'Tis the laſt time theſe eyes ſhall e'er behold
The wretched Philoctetes.
Egi. Thou haſt heard,
My royal miſtreſs, to what deſp'rate heighth
The clam'rous people carry their reſentment;
Our dying Thebans from his puniſhment
Expect their ſafety. Old men, women, children,
United by misfortunes, breath forth vengeance;
Pronounce him guilty, and cry out that heav'n
Demands his blood: can'ſt thou reſiſt the torrent,
Defend, or ſave him?
Joc. Yes: I will defend him;
Even though Thebes ſhou'd lift the murth'rous hand
Againſt

Againſt her queen, beneath her ſmoaking walls
To cruſh Jocaſta, ne'er wou'd I betray
Such injur'd innocence; but ſtill I fear
The tongue of ſlander: well thou know'ſt my heart
Once ſigh'd for Philoctetes; now, Egina,
Will they not ſay I ſacrifice to him
My fame, my gods, my country, and my huſband?
Will they not ſay Jocaſta loves him ſtill?

Egi. Calm thy vain fears; thy paſſion had no witneſs
But me, and never———

Joc. Think'ſt thou that a princeſs
Can e'er conceal her hatred or her love?
O no! on ev'ry ſide the eager eyes
Of courtiers look upon us: thro' the veil
Of feign'd reſpect, with ſubtle treachery
They ſearch our hearts, and trace out ev'ry weakneſs.
Nought can eſcape their ſharp malignant ſight;
A little word, a ſigh, or glance betrays us;
Our very ſilence ſhall be made to ſpeak
Our thoughts; and when their buſy artifice,
Spite of ourſelves, hath drawn the ſecret from us,
Then their loud cenſures caſt invidious light
O'er all our actions, and th'inſtructed world
Is quickly taught to echo ev'ry weakneſs.

Egi. But what haſt thou to fear from calumny?
What piercing eye can wound Jocaſta's fame?
Who knows thy love, will know thy conqueſt o'er it;
Will know thy virtue ſtill ſupported thee.

Joc. It is that virtue which diſtreſſes me;
I look, perhaps, with too ſevere an eye
On my own weakneſs, and accuſe myſelf
Unjuſtly; but the image ſtill remains
Of Philoctetes, 'grav'd within my heart
Too deep for time or virtue to efface it;
And much I doubt, if when I ſtrive to ſave him,
I act not leſs from juſtice than from love:
My pity hath too much of tenderneſs;
I tremble oft, and oft reproach myſelf
For my fond care; I cou'd be more his friend,
If he had been leſs dear to me.

Egi.

Egi. But ſay,
Is it your will that he depart?
Joc. It is:
And O! if he would liſten to Jocaſta,
Never return, never behold me more;
Fly from this fatal, this diſtreſsful ſcene,
And ſave my life and fame. But what detains him?
Why haſtes he not? Egina, fly—

SECNE II.

PHILOCTETES, EGINA, JOCASTA.

Joc. He's here.
O Prince, my ſoul is on the rack; I bluſh
To ſee the man whom duty bids me ſhun,
Which ſays I ſhould forget and not betray thee.
Doubtleſs thou know'ſt the dreadful fate that hangs
O'er thy devoted head.
Phil. The clam'rous people
Demand my life; but they have ſuffer'd much,
And therefore, tho' unjuſt, I pity them.
Joc. Yield not thyſelf a victim to their rage:
Away, begone; as yet thou art thyſelf
The maſter of thy fate; but this perhaps
Is the laſt minute that can give me pow'r
To ſave thee: far, O fly far from Jocaſta;
And, in return for added life, I beg thee
But to forget 'twas I who thus preſerv'd it.
Phil. I cou'd have wiſh'd, Jocaſta, thou had'ſt ſhewn
More ſtrength of mind, and leſs compaſſion for me;
Preferr'd with me my honour to my life,
And rather bade me dye than meanly quit
My ſtation here. I yet am innocent,
But in obeying thee I ſhould be guilty.
Of all the bleſſings heav'n beſtow'd upon me,
My honour and my fame alone remain
Untouch'd. O! do not rob me of a treaſure
So precious to me; do not make me thus

Egi.

Unworthy of Jocaſta. I have liv'd,
Liv'd to fulfil the fate allotted to me;
Have paſs'd my ſacred word to Oedipus,
And whatſoe'er ſuſpicions he may cheriſh,
I am a ſtranger to the breach of honour.
Joc. O Philoctetes, let me here intreat thee,
By the juſt gods, by that ill-fated paſſion,
Which once inſpir'd thy breaſt, if aught remains
Of tender friendſhip, if thou ſtill remember'ſt
How much my happineſs on thine depended,
Deign to prolong a glorious life, and days
That ſhould have been united with Jocaſta's.
Phil. To thee devoted I wou'd have them ſtill
In equal tenor flow, and worthy of thee;
I've liv'd far from thee, and ſhall die content,
If thy regard attends me to the tomb.
Who knows but heav'n may yet refuſe to ſee
This bloody ſacrifice; perhaps, in mercy
It guided me to Thebes to ſave Jocaſta;
Shorten'd my days, perhaps, to lengthen thine.
Happy event! the blood of innocence
May be accepted; mine is not unworthy.

SCENE III.

OEDIPUS, JOCASTA, PHILOCTETES, EGINA, ARASPES, with ATTENDANTS.

Oed. Fear not the clamours of an idle crowd,
That rage tumultuous, and demand thy death:
Know, Philoctetes, I have calm'd their rage,
And will myſelf, if needful, be thy guard.
I judge not with the haſty multitude,
But wiſh to ſee thy innocence appear:
My doubtful mind, uncertain where to fix,
Nor dares or to condemn, or to acquit thee:
Heav'n can alone determine all, which hears
My ardent pray'r; at length it ſeems appeas'd,

And

And by its prieſt ſhall ſoon point out the victim.
The gods ſhall ſoon decide 'twixt Thebes and thee.
Phil. Great is thy love of truth, O king, but know
Juſtice extreme is heighth of injury;
We muſt not always hearken to the voice
Of rigour: honour is the firſt of laws,
Let us obſerve it. But thou ſeeſt me ſunk
Beneath myſelf, anſw'ring the ſland'rous tongues
Of baſe defamers, whom I ſhou'd deſpiſe.
O let not Oedipus unite with ſuch
To ruin my fair fame! it is enough
That I deny it; 'tis enough to call
My life before thee. Let Alcides come,
And bring with him the monſters I deſtroy'd,
The tyrants I ſubdued; let theſe ſtand forth
My witneſſes, and let my enemies confute them.
But aſk your prieſt whether his gods condemn me;
I'll wait their ſentence; not becauſe I fear it,
But to preſerve thy perſecuted people.

SCENE IV.

OEDIPUS, JOCASTA, HIGH-PRIEST, ARASPES, PHILOCTETES, EGINA, ATTENDANTS, CHORUS.

Oed. Will heav'n at laſt, indulgent to our pray'rs,
Withdraw its vengeance? By what murth'rous hand
Was it offended?
Phil. Speak, whoſe blood muſt flow
For expiation?
High-p. Fatal gift of heav'n!
Unhappy knowledge! to what dangers oft
Doſt thou betray the heart of curious man!
O wou'd that fate, thus open to my view,
Had o'er its ſecrets drawn th' eternal veil
To hide them from my ſight!
Phil. What evil bring'ſt thou?
Oed. Com'ſt thou the miniſter of wrath divine?

Phil.

Phil. Fear nothing.
Oed. Do the gods demand my life?
High-p. If thou giv'ſt credit to me, aſk me not.
Oed. Whatever be the fate which heav'n decrees,
The ſafety of my country is concern'd,
And I will know it.
Phil. Speak.
Oed. Have pity on us,
Pity th' afflicted, pity——
High-p. Oedipus
Deſerves more, much more, pity than his people.
Leader of the Chorus.
Oedipus loves them with paternal fondneſs;
To his we join our pray'rs. O! hear us thou
Interpreter of heav'n; now hear, and ſave!
Second perſon of the Chorus.
We dye, O! ſave us! turn aſide the wrath
Of th' angry gods; name the perfidious monſter!
Leader of the Chorus.
Name him, and ſoon the parricide ſhall dye.
High-p. Unhappy men! why will ye preſs me thus?
Leader of the Chorus.
Speak but the word, he dies, and we are ſaved.
High p. O! ye will tremble but to hear his name,
When ye ſhall know what pangs he muſt endure.
The God, who ſpeaks by me, in pity dooms him
To baniſhment alone; but dreadful ills
Await the murth'rer: driven to fell deſpair
His own raſh hand ſhall to the wrath of heav'n
Add woes more deep and heavier puniſhment:
Ev'n you ſhall ſhudder at his fate, and own
Your ſafety purchas'd at a rate too dear.
Oed. Obey then.
Phil. Speak.
Oed. Still obſtinate!
High-p. Remember,
If I muſt ſpeak, that thou did'ſt force me to it.
Oed. Inſuff'rable delay! I'll bear no more.
High-p. Since thon wilt bear it then, 'tis—
Oed. Ha! ſpeak, who?
High-p. 'Tis—Oedipus.

Oed.

Oed. I?

High-p. Thou, unhappy prince,
Thou art the man.

Second Perſon of the Chorus.

Alas! what do I hear?

Joc. Say, can it be, interpreter of heav'n?
[*To Oedipus.*
Thou, Oedipus, the murth'rer of my huſband!
To whom Jocaſta yielded with herſelf
The throne of Thebes: the oracle is falſe;
I know it is; thy virtues muſt confute it.

Leader of the Chorus.

O! heav'n, whoſe pow'r decrees the fate of mortals,
O! name another, or to death devote us!

Phil. [*Turning to Oedipus.*] Think not I mean to render ill for ill;
Or from this ſtrange reverſe of fortune take
A mean advantage, to return the wrongs
I ſuffer'd from thy people and from thee:
No, Oedipus, I'll do thee noble juſtice,
That juſtice thou denyd'ſt to Philoctetes.
Spite of the gods, I think thee innocent,
And here I offer thee my willing hand
Againſt thy foes: I cannot heſitate
Which I ſhou'd ſerve, a pontiff or a king.
'Tis a prieſt's buſineſs, whoſoe'er he be,
By whatſoever deity inſpir'd,
To pray for, not to curſe, his royal maſter.

Oed. Tranſcendent virtue! execrable traitor!
Here I behold a demi-god, and there
A baſe impoſter: ſee the glorious privilege
Of altars; thanks to their protecting veil,
With lips profane thou haſt abuſed the pow'r,
Giv'n thee by heaven, to arraign the king;
And yet thou think'ſt the ſacred miniſtry
Thou haſt diſgraced ſhall withhold my wrath:
Traitor, thou ſhould'ſt have periſh'd at the altar
Before thoſe gods whoſe voice thou haſt uſurp'd.

High-p. My life is in thy hands, and thou art now
The maſter of my fate: ſeize then the time
Whilſt yet thou art ſo, for to-day thy doom

Will

Will be pronounc'd. Tremble, unhappy prince,
Thy reign is paſt; a hand unſeen ſuſpends
The fatal ſword that glitters o'er thy head:
Soon ſhall thy conſcious ſoul with horror feel
The weight of guilt; ſoon ſhalt thou quit the throne,
Where now thou ſitt'ſt ſecure, to wander forth
A wretched exile in a diſtant land;
Of wholeſome water and of ſacred fire
Depriv'd, ſhalt take thy ſolitary way,
And to the caves and hollow rocks complain.
Where'er thou goeſt, a vengeful God ſhall ſtill
Purſue thy ſteps; ſtill ſhalt thou call on death,
But call in vain: heav'n, that beholds thy fate,
Shall hide itſelf in darkneſs from thy ſight;
To guilt and ſorrow doom'd, thou ſhall regret
Thy life, and wiſh that thou had'ſt ne'er been born.

Oed. Thus far I have conſtrain'ſt my wrath, and heard thee.
Prieſt, if thy blood were worthy of my ſword,
Thy life ſhou'd anſwer for this inſolence:
But hence, be gone, nor urge my temper further,
Thou author of abominable falſehood.

High-p. Thou call'ſt me hypocrite, and baſe impoſtor;
Thy father thought not ſo.

Oed. Who? Polybus?
My father, ſaid'ſt thou?

High-p. Thou wilt know too ſoon
Thy wretched fate: to day ſhall give thee birth;
To day ſhall give thee death: unhappy man,
Tell me who gave thee birth, or ſay with whom
Thou liv'ſt, beſet with ſorrows and with crimes
For thee alone reſerv'd. O Corinth! Phocis!
Deteſted nuptials! impious wretched race,
Too like its parents ſtem! whoſe deadly rage
Shall fill the world with horror and amaze.
Farewel.

SCENE

SCENE V.

OEDIPUS, PHILOCTETES, JOCASTA.

Oed. His laſt words fix me to the earth
Immoveable; my paſſion is ſubſided;
I know not where I am: methinks ſome god
Deſcended from above to calm my rage;
Who to his prieſt imparted pow'r divine,
And by his ſacred voice pronounc'd my ruin.
Phil. If thou hadſt nought t'oppoſe but king to king,
I wou'd have fought for Oedipus; but know
That prieſts are here more formidable foes,
Becauſe reſpected, fear'd and honour'd more.
Supported by his oracles, the prieſt
Shall often make his ſov'reign crouch beneath him;
Whilſt his weak people, dragg'd in holy chains,
Embrace the idol; tread on ſacred laws
With pious zeal, and think they honour heav'n
When they betray their maſter and their king:
But above all, when int'reſt, fruitful parent
Of riot and licentiouſneſs, increaſe
Their impious rage, and back their inſolence.
Oed. Alas! thy virtues double all my woes,
For great as my misfortunes is thy ſoul;
Beneath the weight of care that hangs upon me,
Who ſtrives to comfort can but more oppreſs.
What voice is this which from my inmoſt ſoul
Pours forth complaints? What crime have I committed?
Say, vengeful gods, is Oedipus ſo guilty?
Joc. Talk not of guilt, my lord, your dying people
Demand a victim; we muſt ſave our country;
Delay it not: I was the wife of Laius,
And I alone ſhou'd periſh: let me ſeek
The wand'ring ſpirit of my murther'd lord
On the infernal ſhore, and calm his rage:
Yes, I will go: may the kind gods accept

My

My life, and aſk no other ſacrifice!
May thy Jocaſta ſave her Oedipus!
Oed. And would'ſt thou dye! are there not woes enough
Heap'd on this head? O! ceaſe, my lov'd Jocaſta,
This mournful language, I am ſunk already
Too deep in grief without new miſeries,
Without thy death to fill my cup of ſorrow.
Let us go in: I muſt clear up a doubt
Too juſtly form'd, I fear: but follow me.
Joc. How coud'ſt thou e'er, my lord——
Oed. No more: come in
And there confirm my terrors, or remove them.

The End of the Third Act.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

OEDIPUS, JOCASTA.

Oed. JOCASTA,'tis in vain: ſay what thou wilt,
Theſe terrible ſuſpicions haunt me ſtill;
The prieſt affrights me; I acquit him now,
And ev'n, in ſecret, am my own accuſer.
O! I have aſk'd myſelf ſome dreadful queſtions;
A thouſand ſtrange events, which from my mind
Were long effac'd, now ruſh in crouds upon me,
And harrow up my ſoul; the paſt obſtructs,
The preſent but confounds me, and the future
Is big with horrid truths; on ev'ry ſide
Guilt waits my footſteps.
Joc. Will not virtue guard thee?
Art thou not ſure that thou art innocent?
Oed. We're oft more guilty than we think we are.
Joc. Diſdain the madneſs of a talking prieſt,
Nor thus excuſe him with unmanly fears.
Oed. Now in the name of the unhappy king,
And angry heav'n, let me intreat thee, ſay,

When Laius undertook that fatal journey,
Did guards attend him?
Joc. I've already told thee,
One follow'd him alone.
Oed. And only one?
Joc. Superior even to the rank he bore,
He was a king, who, like thyſelf, diſdain'd
All irkſome pomp, and never wou'd permit
An idle train of ſlaves to march before him.
Amidſt his happy ſubjects fearleſs ſtill,
And ſtill unguarded liv'd in peace and ſafety,
And thought his people's love his beſt defence.
Oed. Thou beſt of kings, ſent by indulgent heav'n
To mortals here; thou exemplary greatneſs!
Cou'd ever Oedipus his barb'rous hand
Lift againſt thee? but if thou can'ſt, Jocaſta,
Deſcribe him to me.
Joc. Since thou wilt recal
The ſad remembrance, hear what Laius was:
Spite of the froſt which hoary age had ſpread
O'er his fair temples in declining age,
Which yet was vig'rous, his eyes ſparkled ſtill
With all the fire of youth, his wrinkled forehead,
Beneath his ſilver locks, attracted awe
And rev'rence from mankind: if I may dare
To ſay it, Laius much reſembled thee;
With pleaſure I behold in Oedipus
His virtues and his features thus uni'ed.
What have I ſaid t'alarm thee thus?——
Oed. I ſee
Some ſtrange misfortune will o'ertake me ſoon;
The prieſt, I fear, was by the gods inſpir'd,
And but too truly hath foretold my fate:
Cou'd I do this, and was it poſſible?
Joc. Are then theſe holy inſtruments of heav'n
Infallible? Their miniſtry indeed
Binds them to th'altar, they approach the gods,
But they are mortals ſtill; and think'ſt thou then
'Truth is dependent on the flight of birds?
'Think'ſt thou, expiring by the ſacred knife,
'The groaning heifer ſhall for them alone

Remove

Remove the veil of dark futurity?
Or the gay victims, crown'd with flow'ry garlands,
Within their entrails bear the fates of men?
O no! to ſearch for truth by ways like theſe
Is to uſurp the rights of pow'r ſupreme;
Theſe prieſts are not what the vile rabble think them,
Their knowledge ſprings from our credulity.
Oed. Wou'd it were ſo! for then I might be happy?
Joc. It is: alas! my griefs bear witneſs to it.
Once I was partial to them like thyſelf,
But undeceiv'd at length lament my folly;
Heav'n hath chaſtis'd me for my eaſy faith
In dark myſterious lying oracles,
That robb'd me of my child; I hate the baſe
Deluders all; had it not been for them,
My ſon had ſtill been living.
Oed. Ha! thy ſon!
How did'ſt thou loſe him? By what oracles
Did the gods ſpeak concerning him?
Joc. I'll tell thee
What from myſelf I wou'd have gladly hidden.
But 'twas a falſe one; therefore be not mov'd.
Thou muſt have heard I had a ſon by Laius,
A mother's fond diſquietude provok'd me
To aſk his fate of the great oracle.
Alas! what madneſs 'tis to wreſt from heav'n
Thoſe ſecrets which it kindly wou'd conceal:
But I was a weak woman, and a mother.
Before the prieſteſs' feet I fell ſubmiſſive,
And thus her anſwer was; for O! too well
I muſt remember what but to repeat
Now makes me tremble, but thou wilt forgive me:
'Thy ſon ſhall ſlay his father, ſacrilegious,
'Inceſtuous, parricide.' Shall I go on?
Oed. Well, very well———
Joc. In ſhort, it then foretold me,
This ſon, this monſter ſhou'd pollute my bed;
That I, his mother, ſhou'd embrace my ſon,
Juſt recent from the murther of his father.
That thus united by theſe dreadful ties,
I ſhou'd bear children to this hapleſs child.

You ſeem to be diſorder'd at my ſtory,
And dread perhaps to hear the ſad remainder.
Oed. Proceed: what did you with the wretched infant,
Object of wrath divine?
Joc. Believ'd the gods;
Piouſly cruel, ſacrific'd my child,
And ſtifled all a mother's tenderneſs:
In vain the clamours of parental love
Condemn'd the rigid laws of partial heav'n:
Alas! I meant to ſave the tender victim
From his hard fate that threatned future guilt,
And doom'd him to involuntary crimes:
I thought to triumph o'er the oracle,
And in compaſſion gave him up to death.
Cruel compaſſion, and deſtructive too!
Deceitful darkneſs of a falſe prediction!
What did I reap from my inhuman care,
Did it prolong my wretched huſband's life?
Alas! cut off in full proſperity,
He fell by th'unknown hands of baſe aſſaſſins,
Not by his ſon, thus were they both torn from me:
I loſt my child, and cou'd not ſave his father.
By my example taught, avoid my errors,
Baniſh theſe idle fears, and calm thy ſoul.
Oed. After the dreadful ſecret thou haſt told me,
It were not fit I ſhou'd conceal my own:
Hear then my tale; perchance when thou ſhalt know
The ſad relation, which they bear each other,
Thou too wilt tremble: Born the nat'ral heir
To Corinth's throne, from Corinth far remov'd,
I look with horror on my native land:
One day, that fatal day I well remember,
For O! 'tis ever preſent to my thoughts,
And dreadful to my ſoul, my youthful hands
For the firſt time their ſolemn gift prepar'd
An off'ring to the gods, when lo! the gates
Throughout the temple on a ſudden ſtood
Self-open'd, and the pillars ſtream'd with blood;
The altars ſhook; a hand inviſible
Threw back my off'rings, and in thunder thus

A horrid

A horrid voice addreſs'd me: 'Come not here,
'Stain not the holy threſhold with thy feet,
'The gods have from the living cut thee off
'Indignant, nor will e'er accept thy gifts;
'Go, take thy off'rings to the furies, ſeek
'The ſerpents that ſtand ready to devour thee;
'Theſe are thy gods, begone, and worſhip them.'
Whilſt terror ſeiz'd me at theſe dreadful words,
Again the voice alarm'd me, and fortold
All thoſe ſad crimes which heav'n to thee denounc'd
Againſt thy ſon; ſaid, I ſhou'd ſlay my father,
O gods! and be the huſband of my mother.
Joc. Where am I? what malicious dæmon join'd
Our hands, to make us thus ſupremely wretched?
Oed. Reſerve thy tears for ſomething ſtill more dreadful;
Now liſt and tremble: fearful of myſelf,
Leſt I ſhou'd e'er fulfil the dire prediction,
Or oppoſe heav'n, I left my native land,
Broke from the arms of a diſtracted mother,
Wander'd from place to place, diſguis'd my birth,
My family, and name, by one kind friend
Attended; yet, in my diſaſtrous journey,
The God who guided my ſad footſteps oft
Strengthen'd my arm, and crown'd me with ſucceſs:
But happier had it been for Oedipus,
If he had fall'n with glory in the field,
And by his death prevented all his woes:
I was reſerv'd to be a parricide:
The hand of heav'n, ſo long ſuſpended o'er me,
Hath from my eyes at length remov'd the veil
Of ignorance, and now I ſee it all:
I do remember, in the fields of Phocis
(Nor know I how I cou'd ſo long forget
The great event) that in a narrow way
I met two warriors in a ſplendid car:
The path was ſtrait, and we diſputed it:
An idle conteſt for us both; but I
Was young and haughty, from my earlieſt years
Bred up to pride that flow'd in with my blood;
An unknown ſtranger in a foreign land,

I thought myſelf upon my father's throne,
And whomſoe'er I chanc'd to meet eſteem'd
As my own vaſſals, born but to obey me:
I ruſh'd upon them, and with furious arm
Their rapid courſers ſtopp'd in full career;
Hurl'd from their chariot the intrepid pair,
Forward advanc'd in rage, and both attack'd me:
The combat was not long, for vict'ry ſoon
Declar'd for Oedipus. Immortal pow'rs!
Whether from hatred or from love I know not,
But ſurely on that day ye fought for me:
I ſaw them both expiring at my feet,
And one of them, I do remember well,
Who ſeem'd in age well-ſtricken, as he lay
Graſping on th' earth, look'd earneſtly upon me,
Held out his arms, and wou'd have ſpoke: I ſaw
The tears flow plenteous from his half-clos'd eyes:
Methought when I did wound him my ſhock'd ſoul,
All conqu'ror as I was——you ſhake, Jocaſta.

Joc. My lord, ſee Phorbas comes; this way they lead him.

Oed. 'Tis well: my doubts will then be ſatisfy'd.

SCENE II.

OEDIPUS, JOCASTA, PHORBAS, ATTENDANTS.

Oed. Come hither, thou unfortunate old man;
The ſight of him alarms my conſcious ſoul;
Confus'd remembrance tortures me; I dread
To look on, or to queſtion him.

Phor. O queen,
Is this the day appointed for my death;
Haſt thou decreed it? Never but to me
Wert thou unjuſt.

Joc. Fear not, but hear the king,
And anſwer him.

Phor.

Phor. The king?
Joc. Thou ſtand'ſt before him.
Phor. Ye gods! is this the ſucceſſor of Laius?
Oed. Waſte not the time thus idly, but inform me,
Thou wert the only witneſs of his death.
And wounded, ſo 'tis ſaid, in his defence.
Phor. He's dead, and let his aſhes reſt in peace;
Embitter not my fate, nor thus inſult
A faithful ſubject wounded by thy hand.
Oed. I wound thee? I?
Phor. Now ſatiate thy revenge,
And put an end to this unhappy life;
The poor remains of blood which then eſcap'd thee
Now thou may'ſt ſhed; and ſince thou muſt remember
The fatal place where Laius———
Oed. Spare the reſt:
It is enough: I ſee it now: 'twas I:
Ye gods! my eyes are open'd.
Joc. Can it be?
Oed. And art thou he whom my unhappy rage
Attack'd at Daulis in the narrow path?
O yes it is, it muſt be ſo: in vain myſelf
Wou'd I deceive, all ſpeaks too plain againſt me,
I know thee but too well.
Phor. I ſaw him fall,
My royal maſter fall beneath thy hand:
Thou did'ſt the crime, and I have ſuffer'd for it:
A priſon was my fate, and thine a throne.
Oed. Away: I ſoon will do thee ample juſtice,
Thee and myſelf; leave then to me the care
Of my own puniſhment: begone, and ſave me
At leaſt the painful ſight of innocence,
Which I have made unhappy.

SCENE III.

OEDIPUS, JOCASTA.

Oed. O Jocaſta!
For cruel fate forbids me ever more

To call thee by the tender name of wife;
Thou ſee'ſt my crimes; no longer bound to love;
Strike now, and free thyſelf from the dread thought
Of being mine.
Joc. Alas!
Oed. Take, take this ſword,
The inſtrument of my unhappy rage;
Receive, and uſe it for a noble purpoſe,
And plunge it in my breaſt.
Joc. What would'ſt thou do!
O ſtop thy furious grief, be calm, and live.
Oed. Canſt thou have pity on a wretch like me?
No, I muſt dye.
Joc. Thou muſt not: hear Jocaſta,
O hear her pray'rs!
Oed. I will not, muſt not hear thee.
I ſlew thy huſband.
Joc. And thou gav'ſt me one.
Oed. I did, but 'twas by guilt.
Joc. Involuntary.
Oed. No matter, ſtill 'twas guilt.
Joc. O heighth of woe!
Oed. O fatal nuptials! once ſuch envied bliſs!
Joc. Such be it ſtill, for ſtill thou art my huſband.
Oed. O no! I am not; this deſtructive hand
Hath broke the ſacred tye, and deep involv'd
Thy kingdom in my ruin. O! avoid me,
Fear the vindictive God who ſtill purſues
The wretched Oedipus; I fear myſelf,
My timid virtue ſerves but to confound me;
Perhaps my fate may reach ev'n thee, Jocaſta;
Pity thyſelf, pity the hapleſs victims
That periſh daily for my guilt; O ſtrike,
And ſave thy Oedipus from future crimes.
Joc. Do not accuſe, do not condemn thyſelf;
Thou art unhappy, but thou art not guilty:
Thou did'ſt not know whoſe blood thy hand had ſhed
In Daulis's fatal conflict; when remembrance
Calls forth the melancholy deed, I muſt
Weep for myſelf, but ſhou'd not puniſh thee.
Live therefore———

Oed.

Oed. No; it is impoſſible:
Farewel, Jocaſta! whither muſt I go,
O whither muſt I drag this hateful being?
What clime accurs'd, or what diſaſtrous ſhore
Shall hide my crimes, and bury my deſpair?
Still muſt I wander on from clime to clime,
Or riſe by murther to another throne?
Shall I to Corinth bend my way, where fate
Hath heavier crimes in ſtore for Oedipus?
O Corinth! ne'er on thy deteſted borders———

SCENE IV.

OEDIPUS, JOCASTA, DIMAS.

Dim. My lord, this moment is arriv'd a ſtranger,
He ſays, from Corinth, and deſires admittance.
Oed. I'll go and meet him——fare thee well, Jocaſta:
But ſtop thy tears; no more ſhalt thou behold
The wretched Oedipus; it is determined:
My reign is paſt; thou haſt no huſband now,
I am no more a ſov'reign, nor Jocaſta's.
Oppreſs'd with ills I go, in ſearch of climes,
Where far remov'd from thee and from my country,
I ſtill may act as ſhall become a king,
Worthy of thee, and juſtify the tears
Thou ſhed'ſt for Oedipus: farewel! for ever.

The END of the FOURTH ACT.

ACT V. SCENE I.

OEDIPUS, ARASPES, DIMAS, ATTENDANTS.

Oed. WEEP not for me, my friends, nor thus regret
Your ſov'reign's fate: I wiſh for baniſhment;
To me 'tis pleaſure; for I know 'twill make
My people happy: you muſt loſe your king,
But ſhall preſerve his country. When I firſt
Came to the throne of Thebes, I ſerv'd it well;
And, as I mounted, now I ſhall deſcend
In glory: honour ſhall attend my fall:
I leave my country, kingdom, children, all:
Then hear me now, hear my laſt parting words;
A king you muſt have; let him be my choice;
Take Philoctetes: he is gen'rous, noble,
Virtuous, and brave; his father was a king,
And he the friend of Hercules; let him
Succeed me: I muſt hence.—Go, ſearch out Phorbas;
Bid him not fear, but come this moment hither,
I muſt bequeath him ſomething; he deſerves it:
I'll take my farewel as a monarch ought.
Go, bring the ſtranger to me—ſtay thou here.

SCENE II.

OEDIPUS, ARASPES, ICARUS, ATTENDANTS.

Oed. Ha! is it thou, my much lov'd Icarus!
The faithful guardian of my infant years,
Fav'rite and friend of Polybus, my father,
What brought thee hither?

Ica. Polybus is dead.

Oed.

Oed. Alas! my father!
Ica. 'Twas what we expected;
For he had fill'd the meaſure of his days,
And dy'd in good old age; theſe eyes beheld it.
Oed. Where are ye now, miſtaken oracles!
That ſhook my timid virtue, and foretold
That I ſhou'd prove a guilty parricide?
My father's dead, ye meant but to deceive me;
Theſe hands are not polluted with his blood:
The ſlave of error, I have wander'd long
In darkneſs, buſy'd in a fruitleſs toil,
And to remove imaginary ills.
Have made my life a ſcene of real woes,
The offspring of my fond credulity.
How deep muſt be the colour of my fate
When miſeries like this can bring relief!
Bliſs ſpring from ſorrow, and a father's death
Shall be accepted as the gift of heav'n!
But I muſt hence, and to his aſhes pay
The tribute due:—ha! ſilent, and in tears!
Ica. Ought I to ſpeak? O heav'n!
Oed. Haſt thou aught more
Of ill to tell me?
Ica. For a moment grant me
Your private ear.
Oed. Retire.—What can this mean?
[*To the attendants.*
Ica. Think not of Corinth: thither, if thou go'ſt,
Thy death is certain.
Oed. Who ſhall baniſh me
From my own kingdom?
Ica. To the throne of Corinth
Another heir ſucceeds.
Oed. Ye gods! is this
The laſt ſad ſtroke which I am born to ſuffer,
Or will you ſtill purſue me? Fate, go on
And perſecute, thou ſhalt not conquer me:
Let us away to my rebellious ſubjects,
I'll go to be their ſcourge, if not their king,
And find at leaſt an honourable death.
But ſay, what ſtranger has uſurp'd my throne?

Ica.

Ica. He is the ſon-in-law of Polybus,
Who on his head did place the diadem
In his laſt moments; the obedient people
Hail their new ſov'reign.
Oed. Has my father too
Betray'd me, ſided with my faithleſs ſubjects,
And drove me from my throne?
Ica. He did but juſtice,
For thou wert not his ſon.
Oed. Ha! Icarus!
Ica. With terror and regret I muſt reveal
The dreadful ſecret, Corinth——
Oed. Not his ſon!
Ica. Thou art not. Polybus, oppreſs'd by conſcience,
Dying declar'd it; to the royal blood
Of Corinth's kings he yielded up his throne:
I, who alone enjoy'd his confidence,
And therefore dreaded the new ſov'reign's pow'r,
Fled to implore thy aid.
Oed. Who am I then,
If not the ſon of Polybus?
Ica. The gods,
Who truſted to my hands thy infant years,
In ſhades of darkeſt night conceal thy birth;
I only know, that ſoon as born condemn'd
To death, and on a deſart hill expos'd;
Thou but for me had'ſt periſh'd.
Oed. Thus with life
Began my ſorrows, a deteſted object
E'en from my cradle, and accurs'd by all.
Where did'ſt thou light on me?
Ica. On mount Citheron,
Oed. Near Thebes?
Ica. In that deſerted place, a Theban,
Who call'd himſelf thy father, left thee; there
To periſh: ſome kind God conducted me
That way; I pity'd, took thee in my arms,
Reviv'd, and cheriſh'd thee: to Corinth then
Carry'd my little charge, and to the king
Preſented thee; who, mark thy wondrous fate!

His

His child juſt dead, adopted thee his ſon,
And by that ſtroke of policy confirm'd
His tott'ring power: As ſon of Polybus
Thou wert brought up by him who had preſerv'd thee:
The throne of Corinth never was thy right,
But conſcience robb'd thee of what chance beſtow'd.

Oed. Immortal pow'rs, who rule the fate of kings!
Am I thus doom'd in one unhappy day
To ſuffer ſuch variety of woe!
On a frail mortal ſhall your miracles
Be thus exhauſted! But inform me, friend,
This old man, from whoſe hands you took me, ſay,
Haſt thou beheld him ſince that fatal hour?

Icar. Never: perhaps he's dead, he who alone
Cou'd tell thee the ſtrange ſecret of thy birth;
But on my mind his image is engrav'd
So deeply, I ſhou'd know him well.

Oed. Alas!
Wretch that I am! why ſhou'd I wiſh, to find him?
Rather, ſubmiſſive to the will of heav'n
Shou'd I keep cloſe the veil that o'er my eyes
Spreads its benignant ſhade; too well already
I ſee my fate; more knowledge wou'd but ſhew
New horrors; and yet, ſpite of all my woes,
Urg'd on by fatal curioſity,
I thirſt for more: I cannot bear to reſt
In ſad ſuſpenſe: to doubt is to be wretched:
I dread the torch that lights me to my ruin:
I fear to know myſelf, yet cannot long
Remain unknown.

SCENE III.

OEDIPUS, ICARUS, PHORBAS.

Oed. Ha! Phorbas! come this way.

Ica. Surpriſing! ſure the more I look, the more——
'Tis he, my lord, it muſt be he.

Phor.

Phor. Forgive me [*To Icarus.*
If ſtill that face unknown——
Ica. Doſt thou remember?
On mount Citheron——
Phor. How!
Ica. The child you gave me,
The child to death——
Phor. What doſt thou ſay? remember,
Remember what?
Ica. Thou haſt no cauſe to fear;
Be not alarm'd: thou may'ſt rejoice, that infant
Was——Oedipus.
Phor. The light'ning blaſt thee, wretch!
What haſt thou ſaid?
Ica. Doubt not, my lord, whate'er [*To Oedipus.*
This Theban ſays, he gave thee to my arms;
Thy fate is known; this old man is thy father.
Oed. What complicated miſery! Alas! [*To Phorbas.*
If thour't indeed my father, will the gods
E'er ſuffer me to ſhed thy blood?
Phor. O no!
For thou art not my ſon.
Oed. And didſt not thou
Expoſe me in my infancy?
Phor. My lord,
Permit me to retire, and hide from thee
The dreadful truth.
Oed. No, Phorbas; by the gods
I beg thee, tell me all.
Phor. Begone, avoid
Thy children, and thy queen.
Oed. Now anſwer me,
For to reſiſt is vain: that infant, doom'd
To death by thee, ſay, didſt thou give it him.
[*Pointing to Icarus.*
Phor. I did: and wou'd that day had been my laſt!
Oed. And of what country was that child!
Phor. Of Thebes.
Oed. And thou art not his father?
Phor. No alas!
Sprung from a nobler, but more wretched race——

Oed.

Oed. Who was he then?
Phor. My lord, what wou'd you do?
[*Throwing himſelf at the feet of* Oedipus.
Oed Speak, ſpeak, I ſay.
Phor. Jocaſta was his mother.
Ica. Behold the fruit of all my gen'rous care!
[*Looking at* Oed.
Phor. What have we done?
Oed. I thought it muſt be ſo.
Ica. My lord———
Oed. Away, begone, this moment leave me:
The dreadful gifts ye have beſtow'd on me
Muſt have their recompenſe; and ye have cauſe
To fear my wrath, for ye preſerv'd my life.

SCENE IV.

Oed. At length the dire prediction is fulfill'd,
And Oedipus is now, tho' innocent,
A baſe inceſtuous parricide: O virtue!
Thou fatal empty name; thou who didſt guide
My hapleſs days, thou hadſt not pow'r to ſtop
The current of my fate: alas! I fell
Into the ſnare by trying to avoid it:
Heav'n led me on to guilt, and ſunk a pit
Beneath my ſliding feet: I was the ſlave
Of ſome unknown, ſome unrelenting pow'r,
That us'd me for its inſtrument of vengeance:
Theſe are my crimes, remorſeleſs cruel gods!
Yours was the guilt, and ye have puniſh'd me.
Where am I? what dark ſhade thus from my eyes
Covers the light of heav'n? the walls are ſtain'd
With blood; the furies ſhake their torches at me;
The light'nings flaſh: hell opens her wide gates:
O Laius! O my father! art thou there?
I ſee the deadly wound theſe hands had made;
Revenge thee now on this abhorred monſter,
A monſter who defil'd the bed of her
Who bore him: lead me to the dark abode,

That

That I may ſtrike freſh terror to the hearts
Of guilty beings by my puniſhment:
Lead on, I'll follow thee.

SCENE V.

OEDIPUS, JOCASTA, EGINA, CHORUS.

Joc. O Oedipus,
Diſpel my fears, thy dreadful cries alarm me.
Oed. Open, thou earth, and ſwallow me!
Joc. Alas!
What ſad misfortune moves thee thus?
Oed. My crimes.
Joc. My lord!——
Oed. Away, Jocaſta.
Joc. Cruel huſband!
Oed. O ſtop! what name is that? am I thy huſband?
Do not ſay huſband: we ſhall hate each other.
Joc. What ſay'ſt thou?
Oed. 'Tis enough: I have fulfill'd
My horrid fate: know, Laius was my father;
I am thy ſon.

Leader of the Chorus.

O guilt!

Second perſon of the Chorus.

O dreadful day!
Joc. Egina, drag me from this horrid place!
Egi. Alas!
Joc. If thou haſt pity on Jocaſta,
If without horror thou can'ſt now approach me,
Aſſiſt me now, compaſſionate thy queen!

Leader of the Chorus.

Ye gods! and is it thus your vengeance ceaſes?
Take back your cruel gifts, t'were better far
That we had ſuffer'd ſtill.

SCENE

SCENE VI.

JOCASTA, EGINA, HIGH-PRIEST, CHORUS.

High-p. Attend, ye people,
And know, a milder ſun now beams upon you:
At length the baleful peſtilence is fled,
The graves once more are clos'd, and death hath left us;
The God of heav'n and earth declares his goodneſs
In peals of thunder: hark! [*Thunder and lightning.*
Joc. What dreadful flaſhes!
Where am I? heav'n! what do I hear! Barbarians—
High-p. 'Tis done: the gods are ſatisfy'd: no more
Doth Laius from the tomb cry out for vengeance:
Jocaſta, thou may'ſt live and reign; the blood
Of Oedipus ſufficeth.
Chor. Gracious heav'n!
Joc. My ſon! and muſt I call him huſband too!
Dear dreadful names! is he then dead?
High-p. He lives,
But from the living and the dead cut off,
Depriv'd of light: I ſaw him plunge this ſword,
Stain'd with his father's blood, into his eyes:
This fatal moment has to Thebes reſtor'd
Her ſafety: ſuch are the decrees of heav'n;
Which, as it wills, decides the fate of mortals,
All-pow'rful or to ſave or to deſtroy.
Its wrath is all exhauſted on thy ſon,
And thou art pardon'd.
Joc. Puniſh then thyſelf. [*Stabs herſelf.*
Jocaſta, thus reſerv'd for horrid inceſt,
Death is the only good remaining for me:
Laius, receive my blood: I follow thee:
I have liv'd virtuous, and ſhall dye with pleaſure.
Chor. Unhappy queen, and ſad calamity!

Joc.

Joc. Weep only for my ſon, who ſtill ſurvives.
Prieſts, and you Thebans, who were once my ſubjects,
Honour my aſhes, and remember ever,
That, midſt the horrors which oppreſs'd me, ſtill
I cou'd reproach the gods; for heav'n alone
Was guilty of the crime, and not Jocaſta.

The END of the FIFTH and LAST ACT.

MARIAMNE.

A

TRAGEDY.

PREFACE.

I HAVE printed this piece not without fear and trembling; the number of performances which have met with applauſe on the ſtage, and contempt in the cloſet, give me but too much reaſon to apprehend the ſame fate with regard to my own. Two or three agreeable incidents, together with the art and management of the actors, might conciliate an audience in the repreſentation; but a very different degree of merit is neceſſary to make it ſhine in the full glare of publication. Little will avail the regular conduct of it, and even, perhaps, as little the intereſting nature of the ſubject. Every work that is written in verſe, though it may be unexceptionable in all other reſpects, muſt of neceſſity diſguſt if every line is not full of ſtrength and harmony; if there is not an elegance running through the whole; if the piece has not, in ſhort, that inexpreſſible charm, which nothing but true genius can beſtow upon it; that point of perfection which knowledge alone can never attain to, and concerning which we have argued ſo poorly, and to ſo little purpoſe, ſince the death of Monſ. Deſpréaux.

It is a great miſtake to imagine, that the verſification of a dramatic performance is either the eaſieſt or the leaſt conſiderable part of it. Racine, who, of all men upon earth, after Virgil, beſt knew the art of verſe, did not think it ſo: he employ'd two whole years in writing his Phædra. Pradon boaſts of having compos'd his in leſs than three

three months. As the tranſient ſucceſs of a tragedy depends, with regard to the repreſentation, not on the ſtile, but on the incidents and the actors, the two Phædras ſeem'd at firſt to meet with an equal degree of applauſe; but the publication ſoon determin'd the real and intrinſic merit of each of them. Pradon, according to the uſual practice of bad authors, came out with an inſolent preface; accuſing all thoſe who had attack'd his piece as unfair and partial criticks; a trouble which he might as well have ſpared himſelf; for his tragedy, puff'd off as it was by himſelf and his party, ſoon ſunk into that contempt which it deſerves; and if it were not for the Phædra of Racine, the world wou'd not know at this day that Pradon had ever wrote one.

But whence then ariſes the vaſt difference between theſe two performances? the plot is nearly the ſame in both. Phædra dies, Theſeus is abſent in the two firſt acts: he is ſuppos'd to be in the ſhades below with Pirithous. Hippolytus, his ſon, wants to leave Trezene, and to fly from Aricia, whom he is in love with: he declares his paſſion to Aricia, and liſtens to Phædra's with horror: he dies the ſame kind of death, and his governor relates the manner of it.

Add to this likewiſe, that the principal perſonages in both pieces, as they are in the ſame circumſtances, ſay almoſt the ſame things: but this is the very place which diſtinguiſhes the great man from the bad poet; when Racine and Pradon have the ſame ſentiments, they differ moſt from each other; for a proof of this, let us take the declaration of Hippolytus to Aricia. Racine makes him talk thus:

I who

I who ſo long defy'd the tyrant's pow'r,
Smil'd at his chains, and made a mock of love:
Myſelf on ſhore, I ſaw weak mortals wreck'd
And thought I ſafely might behold the ſtorm
At diſtance rage, which I cou'd never feel:
And muſt I ſink beneath the common lot?
I muſt: this haughty ſoul at length is conquer'd,
And hangs on thee: for ſix long months deſpair
And ſhame have rent my ſoul: where'er I go,
The wound ſtill rankles: with myſelf long time
In vain I ſtruggled, reaſon'd, wept in vain:
When abſent ſeek thee, and when preſent ſhun:
Thy image haunts me in the ſylvan ſhade:
The day-light's ſplendor and the evening's gloom
All bring the lov'd Aricia to my eyes:
All, all, unite to make this rebel thine.
O! I have loſt myſelf: the bow unbent,
And uſeleſs arrows lay neglected by me;
Thy leſſons, Neptune, are no more remember'd:
The woods re-echo to my ſighs alone
Reſponſive, and my idle courſers now
Forget the voice of their Hippolytus.

Now obſerve how this Hippolytus expreſſes himſelf in Pradon.

Long time, too long, alas! with lips profane,
Laughing at love, did I adore Diana;
A ſolitary ſavage long I liv'd,
And chaſed the bears and lions in the foreſt;
But now more preſſing cares employ my time,
For ſince I ſaw thee I have left off hunting,
Tho' once I took delight in it, but now
I never go there but to think of you.

It is impoſſible to read and compare theſe two pieces without admiring one and laughing at the other; and yet there is the ſame ground of thoughts

thoughts and ſentiments in both: when we are to make the paſſions ſpeak, all men have pretty nearly the ſame ideas; but the manner of expreſſing them, diſtinguiſhes the man of wit from him that has none; the man of genius from him who has nothing but wit; and the real poet from him who wou'd be a poet if he cou'd.

To arrive at Racine's perfection in writing, a man muſt poſſeſs his genius, and withal muſt poliſh and correct his works as he did; how different then ought I to be, born as I am with ſuch indiffident talents, and oppreſs'd by continual diſorders, who have neither the gift of a fine imagination, nor time to correct laborioufly the faults of my performances! I am ſenſible of and lament the imperfections of this piece, as well with regard to the conduct as the diction of it: I ſhou'd have mended them a little, if I cou'd have put off this edition for a little longer; but ſtill I ſhou'd have left a great many behind. In every art there is a certain point beyond which we can never advance: we are ſhut up within the limits of our talents; we ſee perfection lying beyond us; and only make impotent endeavours to attain to it.

I ſhall not make a formal and regular critique on this piece, the reader will probably ſave me that trouble; but it may be neceſſary to ſay ſomething concerning a general objection to the choice of my ſubject. As it is the nature of Frenchmen to lay hold with rapidity on the ridicule of things, in themſelves the moſt ſerious, it has been ſaid, that the ſubject of Mariamne is nothing but an old amorous brutal huſband; whoſe wife, being out of humour with him, refuſes him the return of conjugal duty: to which

it

it has been added, that a family quarrel cou'd never make a good tragedy. I wou'd only beg theſe criticks to join with me in a few reflections on this ſtrange kind of prejudice.

The plots of tragedies are generally founded, either on the intereſts of a whole nation, or the private intereſts of the ſovereign. Of the firſt kind are the Iphigenia in Aulis; where all Greece, met in full aſſembly, demand the blood of the ſon of Agamemnon; the Horatii, where the three combatants are to deçide the fate of Rome; and the Oedipus, where the ſafety and proſperity of Thebes depends on the diſcovery of the murtherer of Laius. Of the latter kind are Britannicus, Phædra, Mithridates, *&c.* In theſe all the intereſt is confin'd to the hero of the piece and his family: all turns upon ſuch paſſions as the vulgar feel equally with princes, the plot of them may be as proper for comedy as for tragedy: for, take away the names only, and *Mithridates* is no more than *an old fellow in love with a young girl: his two ſons are in love with her at the ſame time: and he makes uſe of a very low artifice to diſcover which of his ſons the lady is fond of. Phædra is a ſtep-mother, who, egg'd on by her confidante, makes love to her ſon-in-law, who is unfortunately pre-engag'd. Nero is an impetuous young man, who falls precipitately in love, and immediately wants to be ſeparated from his wife, and hides himſelf behind the tapeſtry to overhear the converſation of his miſtreſs.* Theſe are all of them ſubjects which *Moliere* might treat as well as *Racine:* nay, the whole plot of the *Miſer* is exactly the ſame as that of *Mithridates: Harpagon* and the *king of Pontus* are two old fellows in love: each of them has a ſon for his rival; both of them make uſe

of the ſame artifice to diſcover the intrigue carry'd on between the ſon and the miſtreſs; and both pieces end in the marriage of the young man.

Moliere and *Racine* met with equal ſucceſs: one made the world laugh, amus'd, and entertain'd them; the other mov'd, terrify'd and made us weep. *Moliere* expos'd the folly of an old miſer in love; *Racine* painted the weakneſs of a great man, and ſo contriv'd, as at the ſame time even to make that weakneſs reſpectable.

Were we to order *Vateau* and *le Brun*, each of them, to paint us a wedding; one wou'd give us the repreſentation of a groupe of peaſants in an arbour, full of vulgar joy and jollity, plac'd round a ruſtic table, where drunkenneſs, riot, debauchery, and immoderate laughter reign'd without controul: the other wou'd paint the marriage of *Peleus* and *Thetis*, the feaſt of the gods, with all their ſolemn and majeſtic celebration of it. Thus both of them wou'd reach the higheſt degree of perfection in their art, by means intirely different.

We may fairly apply every one of theſe examples to *Mariamne*. The bad temper of a woman; the love of an old huſband; the malicious tricks of a ſiſter-in-law; are ſubjects in themſelves inconſiderable, and ſeem rather adapted to comedy: but at the ſame time a king, whom all the world have honour'd with the name of *Great*, paſſionately enamour'd with the fineſt woman in the univerſe; the rage and fury of a monarch ſo famous for his virtues and his crimes, his paſt cruelty, and his preſent remorſe; that perpetual

and

and rapid tranſition from love to hatred, and from hatred to love; the ambition of his ſiſter; the intrigues of his miniſters; the diſtreſsful ſituation of a princeſs whoſe virtue and beauty have been ſo often celebrated and talk'd of to this day, who had ſeen her father and brother doom'd to death by her huſband; and to complete her misfortunes, ſaw herſelf belov'd by the murtherer of her family. What a field is here! what an opening for any genius but mine! can we ſay this is a ſubject unfit for tragedy? Here we may indeed aver, that, *according as things turn out, they change their names.*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

VARUS, a Roman Prætor, Governor of Syria.
HEROD, King of Palæſtine.
MARIAMNE, Wife of Herod.
SALOME, Siſter of Herod.
ALBINUS, Friend to Varus.
MAZAEL, IDAMAS, } Herod's Miniſters.
NABAL, an old Officer under the Aſmonæan Kings.
ELIZA, Confidante of Mariamne.

Herod's Guard, Attendants on Varus, Herod, and Mariamne.

SCENE JERUSALEM.

MARIAMNE.

MARIAMNE.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

SALOME, MAZAEL.

Maz. IT is enough: the pow'r of Salome,
By all acknowledg'd, and by all obey'd,
On its firm baſis ſtands immoveable:
I fled to Azor, with the light'ning's ſpeed,
Ev'n from Samaria's plain to Jordan's ſpring,
And quick return'd: my preſence there indeed
Was needful, to cut of th' aſpiring hopes
Of Iſrael's moody race: thy brother Herod,
So long detain'd at Rome, was almoſt grown
A ſtranger in his kingdom; and the people,
Ever capricious, turbulent, and bold,
Still to their kings unjuſt, aloud proclaim'd,
That Herod was condemn'd to ſlavery
By haughty Rome; and Mariamne, rais'd
To the high rank of her proud anceſtors,

Wou'd from the blood of our high-prieſts ſelect
A king, to rule o'er conquer'd Palæſtine.
With grief I ſee, ſhe is by all ador'd;
Her name the dear delight of ev'ry tongue;
Iſrael reveres the race from whence ſhe ſprang,
Ev'n to idolatry: her birth, her beauty,
And, above all, her ſorrows, melt the hearts
Of the rude rabble, who, thou know'ſt, deteſt
And rail at us. They call her their dear ſov'reign,
And ſeem to threaten thee with ſwift deſtruction.
I ſaw the fickle multitudes alarm'd
With idle tales like theſe, but ſoon I taught e'm
Another leſſon; ſoon I made e'm tremble:
Told e'm great Herod, fraught with double pow'r,
And arm'd with vengeance, wou'd ere long return:
His name alone ſtruck terror to their ſouls,
They ſaw their folly then, and wept in ſilence.

Sal. Thou told'ſt them truth, for Herod comes, and ſoon
Shall make rebellious Sion bend beneath him.
Antony's favorite is Cæſar's friend;
Fortune attends him, at his chariot wheels
Submiſſive chain'd: his ſubtle policy
Is equal to his courage, and he riſes
With added ſtrength and glory from his fall:
The ſenate crown him.

Maz. But when Mariamne
Shall ſee her huſband, where will be thy pow'r?
That haughty rival o'er the king had ever
A fatal influence that ſupplanted thee;
And her proud ſpirit, ſtill inflexible,
And ſtill revengeful, holds its enmity:
Her ſafety muſt depend on thy deſtruction,
And mutual inj'ries nouriſh mutual hate.
Doſt thou not dread her all-ſubduing charms,
Thoſe lordly tyrants o'er the vanquiſh'd Herod?
For five years paſt, e'er ſince their fatal marriage,
Hath his ſtrange paſſion for her ſtill increas'd,
By hatred fix'd, and nouriſh'd by diſdain.
Oft have we ſeen the haughty monarch kneel
Before her feet, her eyes indignant turn'd

In

In fury from him, whilſt in vain he ſu'd
For ſofter looks than ſhe wou'd deign to give.
How have we ſeen him rage, and ſigh, and weep,
Abuſe, and flatter, threaten and implore!
Mean in his rage, and cruel in his love;
Abroad a hero, and a ſlave at home:
He puniſh'd an ungrateful barb'rous race,
And, reeking with the father's blood, ador'd
The daughter; rais'd the dagger to her breaſt,
Guided by thee, then dropp'd it at her feet.
At Rome indeed, whilſt from her ſight remov'd,
The chain was looſen'd; but 'twill re-unite
When he returns, and ſhall again behold
The fatal charms which he ſo long admir'd:
Thoſe pow'rful eyes are ever ſure to pleaſe,
And will reſume their empire o'er his heart:
Her foes will ſoon be humbled, and if ſhe
But gives the nod, muſt fall a ſacrifice
To her reſentment. Let us guard againſt it,
And court that pow'r which we can ne'er deſtroy:
Reſpect well-feign'd may win her to our purpoſe.

Sal. No: there are better methods to remove
Our fears of Mariamne.

Maz. Ha! what means?

Sal. Perhaps ev'n now ſhe dies.

Maz. And wilt thou dare
To do a deed ſo deſp'rate? If the king—

Sal. The king aſſiſts me in the work of vengeance,
And has conſented: Zares is arriv'd
At Solyma; my inſtrument of wrath
Waits for his victim: know, the time, the place,
The hand to execute, are ready all:
To-day it muſt be done.

Maz. Haſt thou then gain'd
At laſt the vict'ry? Cou'd the king believe thee?
Spite of his paſſion, will he yield up all,
And act as thou command'ſt?

Sal. Not ſo: my pow'r
Is more confin'd: ſcarce cou'd I urge to vengeance,
With all my arts, his long-reluctant ſoul;
But I avail'd me of his abſence from her:

Whilſt Herod liv'd, expos'd to all her charms,
Thou know'ſt I led a life of wretchedneſs,
Of doubt and fear, uncertain of my fate;
When, by a thouſand crooked paths, at laſt
I found a paſſage to his heart, and thought
I had ſecur'd it, Mariamne came;
And, when he ſaw her, all was loſt again;
My arts all baffled by a ſingle glance:
Yes, the proud queen was miſtreſs of my life,
And might have ta'en it: had ſhe known the way
To manage well her eaſy lover's fondneſs,
Herod had ſign'd the mandate for another,
And not for Mariamne; then the blow
I meant for her had fall'n on Salome:
But I have made her pride aſſiſt my vengeance,
And I have only now to point the dart,
Which her own hand hath faſhion'd, to deſtroy her.
Thou may'ſt remember well the fatal time
That blaſted all our hopes; when, Antony
Subdued, Auguſtus took the reigns of empire,
Each eaſtern monarch trembled on his throne:
Amongſt the reſt my hapleſs brother fear'd,
With his protector, he had loſt his crown.
Reſiſtance now was vain, and nought remain'd
But to addreſs the conqu'ror of the world
In lowlieſt terms, and aſk forgiveneſs of him.
Call back that dreadful day, when Herod, driv'n
Ev'n to deſpair, beheld proud Mariamne
Spurn at his offer'd love and kind farewel;
Heard her with anguiſh heap reproaches on him;
Call for a father's and a brother's blood,
Shed by her tyrant huſband: Herod flew
To me, and told his griefs; I ſeiz'd the moment
Propitious to my vengeance, and regain'd
A ſiſter's pow'r o'er his diſtreſsful heart;
Enflam'd his rage, and ſharpen'd his deſpair;
Dipp'd in freſh poiſon the envenom'd dart
That pierc'd his ſoul: then, deſp'rate in his wrath,
Thou heard'ſt him ſwear t'exterminate the race
Of Hebrews, and deſtroy its poor remains;
Condemn the mother, and cut off her ſons

From

From their inheritance: but ſoon to rage
Succeeded love; one look from her diſarm'd
His vengeance. I, with double eagerneſs,
Preſs'd his departure, and at length prevail'd:
He left her; from that hour I was ſucceſsful;
My frequent letters kept up his reſentment,
And, abſent from her, all his rage return'd:
He bluſh'd in ſecret for his weakneſs paſt,
And by degrees, as I remov'd the veil,
His eyes were open'd: Zares caught with me
The favourable hour, and painted her
In blackeſt colours; told him of her pow'r,
Her int'reſt, friends, and the ſeditious faction,
The partiſans of th'Aſmonæan race.
But I did more, I rais'd his jealouſy;
He trembled for his glory, and his life:
Continual treaſons had alarm'd his ſoul,
And left it ever open to ſuſpicion:
Whate'er he fears, ſtill ready to believe,
He is not able to diſtinguiſh guilt
From innocence: in ſhort, I fix'd his ſoul,
Guided his hand, and made him ſign the mandate.

Maz. 'Twas nobly done: but what will Varus ſay,
The haughty præ'or, will he ſee unmov'd
A deed ſo daring? he's thy maſter here,
And, unconfirm'd by Rome, thy pow'r is nothing.
From Varus' hand thy brother muſt receive
His crown; nor can he act as ſov'reign here
Till the proud prætor ſhall reſtore it to him.
Will Varus, think'ſt thou, e'er permit a queen,
Left to his care, to fall a ſacrifice?
I know the Romans well, they ne'er forgive
Such rude contempt of their authority.
Thou wilt bring down the ſtorm on Herod's head;
Their thunder's always ready; thoſe proud conqu'rors
Are jealous of their rights, and take, thou know'ſt,
Peculiar pleaſure in the fall of kings.

Sal. Fear not for Herod, Cæſar is his friend,
And Varus knows it, therefore will reſpect him:
Perhaps this Roman means to manage all,
But be it as it may, my aim is vengeance;

I'm on the verge of glory or of ſhame;
To-morrow, nay, to-day may change the ſcene:
Who knows if e'er hereafter I ſhall find
An hour propitious to me, who can tell
If Herod will be ſteady to his purpoſe?
I know his weakneſs, and I muſt prevent it,
Nor give him time to ſay, it ſhall not be.
When it is done, let Varus rage, and Rome
Pour forth her threats, it ſhall not damp my joys:
The Romans are not here my worſt of foes;
No, I have more to fear from Mariamne;
I muſt ſubdue her rival pow'rs, or periſh:
But Varus comes this way, we muſt avoid him:
Zares ere now ſhou'd have been here: I'll hence
And meet him; fare thee well.—If there be need,
My ſoldiers at the leaſt alarm are ready,
And will defend us.

SCENE II.

VARUS, ALBINUS, MAZAEL.

ATTENDANTS on VARUS.

Var. Salome and Mazael—
They ſeem to ſhun us; in their eyes I read
Their terrors; guilt hath reaſon to be fearful,
And dread my preſence.—Mazael, ſtay: go, tell
Thy cruel maſter his deſigns are known;
His wicked inſtrument is now in chains,
And ſhou'd have met the death he merited,
But my regard for Herod bids me hope
That he will ſoon behold the ſnare they laid.
Puniſh the traitors, and revenge the cauſe
Of injur'd virtue: if thou lov'ſt thy king,
If thou regard'ſt his honour or his peace,
Calm his wild rage, embitter not his ſoul

With

With vile ſuſpicions, and remember, ſlave,
Rome is the ſcourge of villany; remember
That Varus knows thee; that he's maſter here,
And that his eyes are open to detect thee.
Away: let Mariamne be obey'd,
And treated like a queen; obſerve her well,
And, if thy life be dear to thee, reſpect her.
Maz. My Lord—
Var. Begone: you know my laſt commands:
Reply not, but obey them.

SCENE III.

VARUS, ALBINUS.

Var. Without thee,
And thy well-timed advice, thou ſeeſt, my friend,
The beauteous Mariamne had been loſt.
Alb. Zares' return rais'd my ſuſpicions of him;
His moſt officious care t'avoid thy preſence,
And troubled features, I muſt own, alarm'd me.
Var. How much I owe thee for th' important ſervice!
By thee ſhe lives; by thee my heart once more
Shall taſte its nobleſt happineſs, the beſt
And faireſt treaſure of the virtuous mind,
The happineſs to ſuccour the oppreſs'd.
Alb. Such gen'rous cares befit the ſoul of Varus;
Thy arm was ever ſtretch'd to help the wretched;
Still haſt thou borne Rome's thunder thro' the world,
And only conquer'd but to bleſs mankind;
Wou'd I might ſay thy pity dictates here,
And not thy love!
Var. Muſt love then be the cauſe?
Who wou'd not cheriſh innocence like hers?
What heart, howe'er indiff'rent, wou'd not plead
So fair a cauſe? who wou'd not dye to ſave her?

Alb.

Alb. Thus the deceitful paſſion hides itſelf
In virtue's garb, and ſteals into the heart:
Thy hapleſs flame—
Var. Albinus, I confeſs it;
The wretched Varus dotes on Mariamne:
Thou ſee'ſt my naked heart, which fears not thee,
Becauſe thou art my friend: judge then, Albinus,
How muſt her dangers have alarm'd my ſoul!
Her ſafety and her welfare are my own;
Death in its ugliеſt form were welcome to me,
If it cou'd make my Mariamne happy.
Alb. How alter'd is the noble heart of Varus!
Love has aveng'd himſelf of all thy ſlights;
No longer do I ſee the virtuous Roman,
Severe and unimpaſſion'd, 'midſt the croud
Of rival beauties, who ſolicited
His wand'ring eyes, regardleſs of their charms.
Var. To virtue then, thou know'ſt, and her alone,
I paid my vows: in vain corrupted Rome
Offer'd her venal beauties to my eyes;
Their pride diſguſted, and their arts diſpleas'd;
Falſe in their vows, and in their vengeance cruel:
I ſaw their ſhameleſs fronts all cover'd o'er
With foul diſhonour: vanity, ambition,
Caprice, and folly, bore the name of love;
Such conqueſts were unworthy of thy friend.
At length the pow'r I had ſo long contemn'd
Indignant ſaw me from his eaſtern throne,
And ſoon ſubdued; it was my fate to rule
O'er Syria's melancholy plains: when heav'n
Had to Auguſtus giv'n the vanquiſh'd world,
And Herod, midſt a croud of kneeling kings,
Fell at his feet, and ſued for his protection,
Hither I came, and fatal to my peace
Was Palæſtine, for there I firſt beheld her.
The melancholy theme of ev'ry tongue
Was Mariamne's woes; all wept her fate,
Doom'd to the arms of an inhuman huſband,
Who ſlew the father of his lovely bride:
Thou know'ſt what mis'ries ſhe had ſuffer'd ſince,

Her

Her ſorrows only equall'd by her virtue:
Truth, ever baniſh'd from the courts of kings,
Dwells on her lips, and all the art ſhe knows
Is but the gen'rous care to ſerve the wretched.
Her duty is her law; her innocence,
Calm and ſerene, contemns the tyrant's pow'r
And pardons her oppreſſor; ev'n ſolicits
My aid to ſave the man who wou'd deſtroy her.
Her virtues, her misfortunes, and her charms
United, are too pow'rful for my ſoul;
I love her, my Albinus; but my love
Is not a paſſion which one day creates,
And in another is forgotten; no:
The heart ſhe has ſubdu'd is not the ſlave
Of looſe deſire, but by her virtue fir'd,
Means to revenge but never to betray her.

Alb. But if the king, my lord, has gain'd from Rome
Permiſſion to return.

Var. Ay, that I fear:
Alas! myſelf did move the ſenate for him.
Perhaps already he returns to empire,
And this abhorred mandate is his own;
The firſt ſad proof of his authority:
It may be fatal to him. Varus' pow'r
May ſoon be loſt, but O! his love remains;
Yes, I will dye in Mariamne's cauſe;
The world ſhall weep her fate, and I revenge it.

END of the FIRST ACT.

ACT

ACT II. SCENE I.

SALOME, MAZAEL.

Sal. THOU ſee'ſt, we're ruin'd; Mariamne triumphs,
And Salome's undone: that ling'ring Zares,
How tedious was his voyage, as if the ſea
Unwillingly tranſported him! whilſt Herod
Flies with the winds to empire and to love:
But ſea and land, the elements, the heav'ns,
All, all conſpire with Varus, to deſtroy me.
Ambition, thou haſt plung'd me deep in woe;
Why did I liſten to thy fatal voice?
I knew his fooliſh heart wou'd ſoon relent;
Ev'n now I fear he has revok'd the mandate,
And all the harveſt of my toil is grief
And danger, that ſtill wait on high condition
Strip'd of its pow'r: already fawning crouds
Adore my rival, and inſult my fall:
My feeble glories, all eclips'd by her,
Shall ſhine no more, for this new deity
Muſt now be worſhip'd: but this is not all,
My death, I know, muſt crown the triumph; ſhe
Can never reign whilſt Salome ſurvives;
She will not ſpare a life ſo fatal to her.
And yet, O ſhame, O infamous ſubmiſſion!
My pride muſt ſtoop to vile diſſimulation,
To ſooth her vanity with feign'd reſpect,
And give her joy of—Salome's deſtruction.

Maz. Deſpair not, Madam, arms may be yet found
To conquer this proud queen: I ever fear'd
Her pow'rful charms, and Herod's weakneſs for her;
But if I may depend on Zares, ſtill
In the king's boſom dwells determin'd hate,

And

And he has ſworn that ſhe ſhall die: the blow
Is but ſuſpended till he comes himſelf
To execute his vengeance; but, mean time,
Whether his heart be ſharpen'd by reſentment,
Or mov'd by love, it is enough his hand
Once ſign'd the mandate: Mariamne ſoon
Will ſwell the tempeſt, and eternal diſcord
Shall rankle in their hearts: I know them well:
Soon will ſhe light again the torch of hatred,
Revive his doubts, and work her own deſtruction:
With new diſdain will irritate his ſoul:
Rely upon herſelf, and mark her ruin.

Sal. O! 'tis uncertain; I can never wait
Such tardy vengeance; I have ſurer means;
Danger has taught me wiſdom: this loud rage,
Theſe violent tranſports of th' impaſſion'd Varus,
If I obſerve aright, can never flow,
From generoſity alone, and pity
Is ſeldom know by marks like theſe: the queen
Has charms, and Varus may have charms for her.
I know the pow'r of Mariamne's beauty,
Nor envy her the croud of gazing fools,
Who throw their flatt'ring incenſe at her feet;
The dang'rous happineſs may coſt her dear:
Whether ſhe liſtens to the Roman's vows,
Or with the conqueſt only means to ſooth
Her fickle pride, it is enough for me,
If it preſerves that pow'r I muſt not looſe
O'er Herod's heart. Take care my faithful ſpies
Perform their office; let them be rewarded,
And ſell me precious ſecrets.—Ha! ſhe comes.
Muſt I then ſee her?

SCENE II.

MARIAMNE, ELIZA, SALOME, MAZAEL, NABAL.

Sal. Joy to Mariamne:
Herod returns, and Rome this day reſtores

To

To me a brother, and to thee a huſband.
Thy cruel ſcorn had rais'd his juſt reſentment,
Which now ſubſides, and love has quench'd the flame
Which love alone inſpir'd: his triumphs paſt,
His future glories, all the ſenate's rights
Repos'd in him, the titles he has gain'd,
All brought to lay at Mariamne's feet,
Proclaim thy happineſs: enjoy his heart;
Enjoy his empire; I am pleas'd to ſee
Thy virtues thus rewarded; Salome
Shall lend her aid to join your hands together.

Mar. I neither look'd for, nor deſir'd your friendſhip:
I know you, madam, and ſhall do you juſtice;
I know by what mean arts, and treach'rous falſhood,
Your pow'rleſs malice has purſu'd my life.
Perhaps thou think'ſt my heart is like thy own,
And therefore trembleſt; but thou know'ſt me not:
Fear nothing, for thy crimes and puniſhment
Are both beneath my notice: I have ſeen
Thy baſe deſigns, and have forgiven them:
I leave thee to thy conſcience, if a heart
Guilty as thine is capable of feeling.

Sal. I've not deſerv'd this bitterneſs and wrath
From Mariamne: to my honeſt zeal,
My conduct, and my brother, I appeal
From thy ſuſpicions.

Mar. I've already told thee,
All is forgotten, I am ſatisfy'd,
And I can pardon, tho' I can't believe thee.

Maz. Now, by the pow'r ſupreme, my royal miſtreſs,
Scarce cou'd my pains—

Mar. Stop, Mazael, excuſe
Is added injury; obey the king,
That is thy duty: ſold to my oppreſſors,
Thou art their inſtrument; perform thy office,
I ſhall not ſtoop to make complaints of thee.
Thou, Salome, may'ſt hence, and tell the king
[*To Salome.*
The ſecrets of my ſoul; enflame his heart
Once more with rage; I ſhall not ſtrive to calm it:
Inſtruct your creatures to deal forth their ſlander,

I've

I've left their vile attempts unpuniſh'd ſtill;
Content to uſe no arms againſt my foes,
But blameleſs virtue, and a juſt diſdain.
Maz. What haughtineſs!
Sal. 'Twill meet with its reward:
It is the pride of art to puniſh folly.

SCENE III.

MARIAMNE, ELISA, NABAL.

Eli. Why, my lov'd miſtreſs, wou'd you thus provoke
A foe who burns with ardor to deſtroy you?
Perhaps the rage of Herod is ſuſpended
But for a time, and yet may burſt upon you.
Death was departing, and thou call'ſt him back,
When th u ſhould'ſt ſtrive to turn his dart aſide:
Thou haſt no friend to guard or to defend thee;
Varus, thy kind protector, muſt obey
The ſenate's orders, and to diſtant realms
Convey its high commands: at his requeſt,
And by thy kind aſſiſtance, Herod gain'd
His pow'r, and now the tyrant will return
With double terror: thou haſt furniſh'd him
With arms againſt thyſelf, and muſt depend
On this proud maſter, to be dreaded more
Becauſe he loves, becauſe his paſſion ſowr'd
By thy diſdain———
Mar. My dear Eliſa, fly,
Bring Varus hither: thou art in the right;
I ſee it all; but I have other cares;
My ſoul is fill'd with more important bus'neſs:
Let Varus come: Nabal, ſtay thou with me.

SCENE IV.

MARIAMNE, NABAL.

Mar. Thy virtues, thy experience, and thy zeal
For Mariamne's welfare, have long ſince

Deſerv'd

Deſerv'd my confidence: thou know'ſt my heart,
And all its purpoſes; the woes I feel,
And thoſe I fear: thou ſaw'ſt my wretched mother,
Driv'n to deſpair, with tears imploring me
To ſhare her flight: her mind, replete with terror,
Sees ev'ry moment the impetuous Herod,
Yet reeking with the blood of half her race,
Aſſaſſinate her deareſt Mariamne.
Still ſhe intreats me, with my helpleſs children,
To fly his wrath, and leave this hated clime;
The Roman veſſels might tranſport us ſoon
From Syria's borders to th' Italian ſhore;
From Varus I might hope ſome kind protection,
And from Auguſtus; fortune points the way
For my eſcape, the only path of ſafety:
And yet, from virtue or from weakneſs, which
I know not, but my fooliſh heart recoils
At flying from a huſband's arms, and keeps,
Spite of myſelf, my ling'ring footſteps here.

Nab. Thy fears are groundleſs; yet I muſt admire them,
Becauſe they flow from virtue: thy brave heart,
That fears not death, yet trembles at the thought
Ev'n of imaginary guilt: but ceaſe
Your cauſeleſs doubts; conſider where you are;
Open your eyes, and mark this fatal palace,
Wet with a father's and a brother's blood.
In vain the king denies the horrid deed;
Cæſar in vain abſolves him from the crime,
Whilſt the whole eaſt pronounce him guilty of it.
Think of thy mother's fears, thy injur'd ſons,
Thy murther'd father, the king's cruelty,
Thy ſiſter's hatred, and what ſcarce my tongue
Can mention without horror, tho' thy virtue
Regardleſs ſmiles, thy death this day determin'd.
If, undiſmay'd by ſuch a ſcene of woe,
Thou art reſolv'd to meet and brave thy fate,
O ſtill remember, ſtill defend thy children:
The king hath ta'en away their hopes of empire,
And well thou know'ſt what dreadful oracles
Long ſince alarm'd thy fears, when heav'n foretold,
That a ſtrange hand ſhou'd one day join thy ſons

To their unhappy father. A wild Arab,
Implacable and pityleſs, already
Hath half fulfill'd the terrible prediction:
After a deed ſo horrid, may he not
Accompliſh all the reſt? From Herod's rage
Nothing is ſacred; who can tell but now,
Ev'n now he comes to act his bloody purpoſe
And blot out all our Aſmonæan race?
'Tis time to guard againſt him, to prevent
His guilt, and ſtop his murth'rous hand; to ſave
Thoſe tender victims from a tyrant's ſword,
And hide them from the ſight of ſuch examples.
Within thy palace from my earlieſt years
Brought up, and by thy anceſtors belov'd,
Thou ſee'ſt me ready to partake thy fortunes
Where'er thou go'ſt: away then; break thy chains;
Fly to the juſtice of a Roman ſenate;
Implore them to adopt thy injur'd ſons,
And ſhelter diſtreſs; ſuch innocence
And virtue will aſtoniſh great Auguſtus.
If juſt and happy is his reign, as fame
Reports, and conquer'd worlds in rapture bend
The knee before him, if he merits all
The honours he has gain'd, he muſt protect thee.
Mar. My doubts are vaniſh'd, and I yield to thee;
To thy advice, and to a mother's tears;
To my ſon's danger, to my own hard fate;
Which dooms me yet perhaps to greater ills
Than I have ſuffer'd. Go thou to my mother;
When night ſhall throw her ſable mantle o'er
This ſeat of guilt, let ſome one give me notice
That all is ready; ſince it muſt be done,
I am prepar'd.

SCENE V.

MARIAMNE, VARUS, ELISA.

Var. I come, great queen, to know
Your laſt commands; which, as the law of heav'n,
Shall

Shall be rever'd: ſay, muſt this arm revenge thee?
Speak, and 'tis done: command, and I obey.
Mar. Varus, I'm much indebted to thy goodneſs,
And, but my ſorrows plead their own excuſe,
Shou'd not be thus importunate; I know
Thou lov'ſt to help the wretched, therefore aſk
Thy gen'rous aid: whilſt Herod's doubtful fate
Hung in the balance, and he knew not which
Awaited him, a priſon or a throne,
I did ſolicit Varus in his favour;
Spite of his cruelties, againſt my peace,
Againſt my int'reſt, I perform'd my duty.
Now Mariamne for herſelf implores
Thy kind protection; begs thee to preſerve
From moſt inhuman laws, her hapleſs ſons,
The poor remains of Syria's royal race.
Long ſince I ſhou'd have left theſe guilty walls,
And aſk'd the ſenate for ſome ſafe retreat;
But whilſt the ſword of war fill'd half the world
With blood and ſlaughter, 'twas in vain to ſeek
For refuge in the ſcene of wild deſtruction:
Auguſtus now hath giv'n the nations peace,
And ſpread his bounties o'er the face of nature:
After the toils of hateful war reſolv'd
To make the world, which he had conquer'd, happy:
He ſits ſupreme o'er tributary kings,
And takes the poor and injur'd to his care:
Who has ſo fair a title to his juſtice,
As my unhappy, my defenceleſs children?
Brought by their weeping mother from afar
To aſk his ſuccour; he will ſhelter them,
His gen'rous hand will wipe off all our tears.
I ſhall not aſk him to revenge my cauſe,
Or puniſh my proud foes; it is enough
If my lov'd children, form'd by his example,
And by his juſtice taught, true Romans ſoon,
Shall learn to rule of thoſe who rule mankind.
A mother's comfort, and her children's ſafety,
Depend on thee: my woes will vaniſh all
If thou wilt hear me; and thy noble heart
Hath ever been the friend of injur'd virtue:

To thee I owe my life: aſſiſt me now,
Remove me, Varus, from this fatal palace;
Grant my benighted ſteps a friendly guide
To Zidon's ports, where now thy veſſels lie.
Not anſwer me! what means that look of ſorrow?
Why art thou ſilent? O! too well I ſee
Thou will not hear the voice of wretchedneſs.
Var. It is not ſo: I hear, and will obey thee:
My guards ſhall follow thee to Rome: diſpoſe
Of them, of me; my heart, my life is thine.
Flee from the Tyrant, break the fatal tye;
'Tis puniſhment enough to be forſaken
By Mariamne: ne'er ſhall he behold thee;
Thanks to his own injuſtice; and I feel
Too well there cannot be a fate more cruel.
Forgive me, but the thought of loſing thee
Hath drawn the fatal ſecret from my breaſt;
I own my crime: but, ſpite of all my weakneſs,
Know, my reſpect is equal to my love:
Varus but wiſhes to protect thy virtue,
But to revenge thy injuries, and die.
Mar. I hop'd the great preſerver of my life
Wou'd prove the guardian of my honour too;
And to his pity only thought I ow'd
His kind aſſiſtance: ne'er did I expect
That he, of all men, ſhou'd increaſe my ſorrows;
Or that, to crown the woes of Mariamne,
I ſhou'd be forc'd to tremble at thy goodneſs,
And bluſh for ev'ry favour I receiv'd:
Yet, think not, Varus, that thy paſſion, thus
Declar'd, ſhall rob me of my gratitude:
My conſtant friendſhip ſhall be ever thine;
I will forget thy love, but not thy virtues:
Thou hadſt my praiſe and my eſteem till now,
But longer converſe may deprive thee of it;
For thy ſake therefore, Varus, I muſt leave thee.

SCENE

SCENE VI.

VARUS, ALBINUS.

Alb. I fear you're troubled, Sir; your colour changes.
Var. Albinus, I muſt own, my ſpirits droop;
Pity, my friend, the weakneſs of a heart
That never lov'd before: alas! I knew not
How ſtrong my fetters were, but now I feel,
Nor can I break them: with what ſweet demeanor,
And lovely ſoftneſs, did ſhe chide my paſſion;
Calm and unruffled, how her tranquil prudence
Taught me my duty, and enforc'd her own;
How I ador'd her ev'n when ſhe repuls'd me!
I've loſt all hope, yet love her more than ever!
Gods! for what dreadful trial of my faith
Am I reſerv'd?
Alb. Wilt thou then aid her flight?
Var. 'Tis a ſad office.
Alb. Art thou pleas'd ſo well
With her diſdain, as thus to make thyſelf
Unhappy, and promote thy own deſtruction?
What doſt thou purpoſe?
Var. Can I e'er forſake her?
Can I rebel againſt her laws? my heart
Were then unworthy of her. Hence my doubts,
'Twas Mariamne ſpoke, and I obey:
Quick let her leave the tyrant; let her ſeek
Auguſtus; ſhe has cauſe to fly, and Varus
Has none to murmur or complain; at leaſt
She leaves me the ſweet pleaſure to reflect,
That I have liv'd and acted but for her;
Have broke her chains, have ſav'd her precious life:
Nay more: for I will ſacrifice my love,
Fly from thoſe dang'rous charms that would betray me,
And imitate the virtue I adore.

END of the SECOND ACT.

ACT III. SCENE I.

VARUS, NABAL, ALBINUS, ATTENDANTS on VARUS.

Nab. THE king, my lord, the happy Herod, comes
Triumphant, and the Hebrews flock in crouds
To meet him: Salome, alarm'd and fearful
Of her declining intereſt, joins his train
Of fawning courtiers, ſooths his pride, and ſtrives
By ev'ry art to gain him to her purpoſe;
The prieſts attend, and ſtrew their palms before him.
With Herod comes the faithful Idamas,
Deputed by his ſov'reign to attend
The noble Varus; he will ſoon be here.
Still hath he prov'd himſelf the conſtant friend
Of Mariamne, and by wholeſome counſels
Soften'd the rage of his impetuous maſter;
The queen, ſtill wav'ring and irreſolute,
Condemns herſelf; her rigid virtue fears
To do what danger tells her muſt be done:
She quits the palace, then returns; mean while
Her anxious mother, falling at her feet,
Bathes them in tears, points to her weeping children,
And trembling begs her to depart: ſhe ſtops,
And doubts, and much I fear will ſtay too long:
'Tis thou muſt haſten her; on thee alone
Depends the ſafety of the nobleſt being
Heav'n e'er gave birth to. O preſerve her; ſave
The race auguſt ſprung from a line of kings;
Save Mariamne. Are your guards all ready?
May I inform her of it?

Var. All's prepar'd:
I gave them orders; ſhe may go this moment.

Nab.

Nab. And wilt thou too permit a faithful ſervant
To follow his lov'd miſtreſs?
Var. Go with her,
Wait on her ſteps, and guard her as thy life:
This hateful place deſerves her not: may heav'n,
In pity to her ſorrows, ſmile upon her;
Light up a fairer ſun to gild her journey,
And bid the waves in ſmoother currents flow,
Obedient to the ſacred charge they bear!
Thou, good old man, may'ſt follow and attend her;
Thou art too happy, but thou haſt deſerv'd it.

SCENE II.

VARUS, ALBINUS, ATTENDANTS on VARUS.

Va. Already Herod comes; the trumpet's ſound
Speaks his return; unwelcome ſound to me!
I dread his preſence: cruel as he is,
Inſtant his wrath may fall on Mariamne:
Wou'd ſhe had left for ever theſe ſad ſeats
Of guilt and horror! wou'd I might partake
Her flight! but O! the more I love, the more
I muſt avoid her: 'twere in me a crime
To follow her; and all that Varus can—
But Idamas approaches.

SCENE III.

VARUS, IDAMAS, ALBINUS, ATTENDANTS on VARUS.

Ida. Ere the king,
My royal maſter, comes, with gratitude
To pay thy bounties, and receive from thee
The holy ſceptre, ſay, wilt thou permit me?—
Var. No more: your king may ſpare this idle homage,
Theſe practis'd arts of viſionary friendſhip

Amongſt

Amongſt the great, drawn forth with pompous ſplendor
But to amuſe the gaping multitude,
And foreign to the heart: but ſay, at length
Rome has conſented; Herod is your king;
Doth he deſerve to reign? Is the queen ſafe,
And will he ſpare the blood of innocence?

Ida. May the juſt gods, who hate the perjur'd man,
Open his eye, now blinded by impoſture!
But who ſhall dive into his ſecret thoughts,
Or trace th' emotions of his troubled ſoul?
Nought can we draw from him but ſullen ſilence;
Or if perchance the name of Mariamne
Eſcape his lips, he ſighs, and raves; this moment
Gives ſecret orders, and the next revokes them:
Herod deteſts the race from whence ſhe ſprung,
And hates her more becauſe he lov'd too well.
Perfidious Zares, by thy order ſtopp'd,
And by thy order freed, th' artificer
Of calumny and fraud, will ſerve the cauſe
Of ſubtle Salome, whilſt Mazael lends
His ſecret aid: the jealous Herod liſtens
To their ſuggeſtions; they beſiege him cloſely;
And their officious hatred ſtill keeps truth
At diſtance from him: this great conqueror,
Who made ſo many potent monarchs tremble,
This king, whoſe noble deeds ev'n Rome admir'd,
Whoſe name yet fills all Aſia with alarms,
In his own houſe beholds his glories fade:
Torn by ſuſpicions, and o'erwhelm'd with grief;
Led by his ſiſter, hated by his wife:
I pity him, and fear for Mariamne.
Say, wilt thou not protect her?

Var. 'Tis enough:
Albinus, follow me, the queen's in danger;
Away, for I muſt ſave the innocent.

Ida. Will you not wait then for the king?

Var. I know
I ſhou'd receive him here: it is my duty,
For ſo the ſenate wills: but other cares

Inſpire me now, and other int'reſts guide:
'Tis my firſt duty to protect the wretched.

[*Exit* Varus.

Ida. What ſtorms do I foreſee? what new diſtreſs
Will ſoon o'ertake us? Now, O Iſrael's God,
Change Herod's heart!

SCENE IV.

HEROD, MAZAEL, IDAMAS, ATTENDANTS on HEROD.

Her. Varus avoid me too!
What horrors meet me here on ev'ry ſide!
Good heav'n! can Herod inſpire nought but hatred
And terror to mankind? Is ev'ry heart
Thus ſhut againſt me? To myſelf diſguſtful,
My people, and my queen; with grief oppreſs'd
I re-aſcend my throne, and only come
To ſee the ſorrows my own hand hath made.
O heav'n!

Maz. Be calm, my lord, let me intreat you.

Her. Wretch that I am, what have I done!

Maz. Ha! weeping!
Shall Herod weep, the great, th' illuſtrious king,
The dread of Parthia, and the friend of Rome,
For wiſdom and for valour long renown'd!
O! think my lord, of thoſe diſtinguiſh'd honours
Which Antony and victory beſtow'd;
Think of thy fame, when ſeen by great Auguſtus,
He choſe thee from a croud of conquer'd kings,
And mark'd thee for his friend: call back the time,
When great Jeruſalem, by thee ſubdued,
Submitted to thy laws: by thee defended,
Once more ſhe ſhines with all her ancient luſtre,
And ſees her ſov'reign crown'd with fair ſucceſs:
Never was king in peace or war more happy.

Her. There is no happineſs on earth for me;
Fate points its poiſon'd arrows at my breaſt;
And, to complete my woes, I have deſerv'd them.

Ida,

Ida. Permit me, Sir, the freedom to obſerve,
Your throne, by fears and jealouſies ſurrounded,
Wou'd ſtand more firmly on love's nobler baſis:
The king who makes his people's happineſs
Secures his own: thy ſoul, thus rack'd with tortures,
Might trace the poiſon'd waters to their ſpring.
O, my lord, ſuffer not malicious tongues
To wound the peace and honour of thy life;
Nor ſervile flatt'rers to eſtrange the hearts
Of thoſe who long to ſerve their royal maſter:
Iſrael ſhall then enamoured with thy virtues—

Her. And think'ſt thou Herod might again be lov'd?

Maz. Zares, my lord, ſtill faithful to his charge,
Burns with the ſame unweary'd zeal to ſerve thee:
He comes from Salome, and begs admittance.

Her. What! both for ever perſecute me! No!
Let not that monſter e'er appear before me;
I've heard too much already: hence, begone,
And leave me to myſelf: what ſhall I do
To calm my troubled ſoul? Stay, Idamas,
And, Mazael, ſtay.

SCENE V.

HEROD, MAZAEL, IDAMAS.

Her. Behold this dreadful monarch,
This mighty king, who made the nations tremble;
Who knew ſo well to conquer and to reign,
To break his chains, and make the world admire
His wiſdom and his pow'r; behold him now,
Alas! how little like his former ſelf!

Maz. All own thy greatneſs, and adore thy virtues.

Ida. One heart alone reſiſts, and that perhaps
May ſtill be thine.

Her. No: Herod's a barbarian,
Unworthy of his throne.

Ida. Thy grief is juſt,
And if for Mariamne———

Her. Fatal name!
'Tis that condemns me; that reproaches ſtill
My tortur'd ſoul with cruelty and weakneſs.
Maz. My lord, your goodneſs but augments her hatred;
She loaths your ſight, and flies from your embraces.
Her. I courted hers.
Maz. Indeed, my lord!
Her. I did:
This ſudden change, this grief that hangs upon me,
Theſe ſhameful tears, do they not all declare
That Herod is return'd from Mariamne?
With love and hatred mingled in my ſoul,
I left the croud of flatt'rers in my court.
And flew to her: but what was my reward?
How did we meet! in anger, frowns, and ſtrife:
In her indignant eyes I read my fate,
And my injuſtice: ſhe ſcarce deign'd to caſt
A look upon me; ev'n my tears avail'd not;
They only ſerv'd to make her ſcorn me more.
Maz. You ſee, my lord, her ſoul's implacable,
And never will be ſoften'd by indulgence;
It but enflames her pride.
Her. I know ſhe hates me;
But I've deſerv'd it, and I muſt forgive her:
She has but too much cauſe from one ſo guilty.
Maz. Guilty, my lord! haſt thou forgot her ſlights,
Contempt, and pride, and wrath, and fierce reſentment;
Her father's plot, her own deſigns againſt you,
And all her race your mortal foes? Hircanus
Had oft betray'd you; th' Aſmonæan league
Was firmly knit; and by ſuch dang'rous pow'rs,
That nothing but a maſter-ſtroke cou'd ſave——
Her. No matter: that Hircanus was her father,
I ſhou'd have ſpar'd him; but I only liſten'd
To proud ambition, and the love of empire:
My cruel policy deſtroy'd her race;
I kill'd the father, and proſcrib'd his daughter:
I wanted but to hate and to oppreſs,
And heav'n, to puniſh me, hath made me love her.
Ida. To feel a paſſion for a worthy object
Is not a weakneſs in us; but a virtue,

Worthy

Worthy of ev'ry good heav'n hath given thee;
Eſteem thy love amongſt its choiceſt bleſſings.
Her. What hath my raſhneſs done! ye ſacred names,
Hircanus, Oh!
Maz. Baniſh the ſad remembrance,
And grant, kind heav'n, the queen too may forget it!
Her. Unhappy father! more unhappy huſband!
The inj'ries I have done my Mariamne
Make her more dear: O! if her heart—her faith—
But I have ſtay'd too long: now, Idamas,
I'll make amends for all; go, haſte, and tell her,
My ſoul, obedient to her will, ſhall lay
My throne, my life, my glory at her feet:
Amongſt her ſons I'll chuſe a ſucceſſor.
She has accus'd my ſiſter as the cauſe
Of her misfortunes, henceforth I diſclaim her;
A nearer tye demands the ſacrifice,
And Salome muſt yield to Mariamne:
My queen ſhall rule with pow'r unlimited!
Maz. My lord, you will not———
Her. Yes: I am reſolv'd:
I know her now; ſhe is the choiceſt gift
Of bounteous heav'n; as ſuch I ſhall revere her:
What cannot love, the mighty conqu'ror, do?
To Mariamne I ſhall owe my virtue.
In ſavage pomp, and barb'rous majeſty,
Too long hath Aſia ſeen her ſov'reign rule
Reſpected by his people; fear'd, admir'd,
Yet hated ſtill; with crouds of worſhippers,
But not one friend. My ſiſter, whom long time
This fooliſh heart believ'd, hath ne'er conſulted
My happineſs, my int'reſt, or my fame:
For Salome, more cruel than myſelf,
And more revengeful, dipp'd her hands in blood,
And ruled my ſubjects with a rod of iron:
Whilſt Mariamne felt for the unhappy,
Forgot her own diſtreſs to pity theirs,
And told me all their ſorrows: but 'tis paſt:
Henceforth I will be juſt, but not ſevere;
I'll ſtrive to pleaſe her by promoting ſtill

The public weal: Judah ſhall bleſs my reign,
For I am chang'd. From this auſpicious hour,
Far from my throne, ſhall ev'ry jealous fear
Be now remov'd: I will dry up the tears
Of the oppreſs'd, and reign o'er Palæſtine,
Not as a tyrant, but a citizen;
Gain ev'ry heart to merit Mariamne's.
O ſeek her, tell her how my ſoul repents;
That my remorſe is equal to my raſhneſs.
Run, fly, begone, and inſtantly return.
What do I ſee? my ſiſter? hence: O heav'n,
Finiſh the woes of my unhappy life!

SCENE VI.

HEROD, SALOME.

Sal. Well, Sir, you've ſeen your dear deceitful foe,
And ſuffer'd more affronts; I know you have.
Her. Madam, permit me to inform you, this
Is not a time to add to my misfortunes;
I wou'd remove them: my imperious temper
Made me more fear'd indeed, but more unhappy:
Too long already o'er this houſe of ſorrow
Hath vengeance pour'd her black and deadly poiſon:
The queen and you, thus at perpetual variance,
Wou'd be a ſpring of endleſs mis'ry; therefore,
My ſiſter, for our mutual happineſs,
For thy repoſe and mine, 'tis beſt to part;
Immediately, away: it muſt be ſo.
Sal. What do I hear! O fatal enemy!
Her. A king commands, a brother begs it of thee:
O may he ne'er again be forc'd to give
One cruel order, ne'er take vengeance more,
Nouriſh ſuſpicions, or ſhed guiltleſs blood!
Thou ſhalt no longer make my life a burthen;
Complain of me, lament thyſelf, but go.
Sal. Alas! my lord, I ſhall make no complaints;
Since I am doom'd to baniſhment by thee,

I:

It muſt be juſt, and fitting that I ſhou'd be;
For I have ever learn'd to make thy will
My law: if thou command'ſt, I muſt obey;
I never ſhall reſent the injury,
Or call on nature and the ties of blood,
Or to atteſt, or vindicate my wrongs;
The voice of nature's ſeldom heard by kings,
The ties of blood are much too weak to bind them:
I will not boaſt that tender friendſhip now
Whoſe zeal offends thee; much leſs wou'd I call
To thy remembrance all my ſervice paſt;
One look I ſee from Mariamne ſoon
Effaces all: but can'ſt thou ever think
She will forget th' attempt upon her life
Which Herod made? thee ſhe muſt fear: thou therefore
Shoud'ſt dread her more: thou know'ſt her vows, her thoughts
Are bent againſt thee, and whoſe counſels now
Shall ſtay her vengeance? Where's the faithful heart
Devoted to thee? where's the watchful eye,
Ever awake, to guard the life of Herod?
Who ſhall unravel all her ſubtle plots,
Or who reſtrain her wrath? Doſt thou believe,
When thou haſt put thy life within her pow'r,
That love will plead for thee? O no! ſuch hate,
Such ſcorn as her's, ſuch deſperate reſentment———

Her. Permit me, Salome, at leaſt to doubt,
At leaſt delude me with the flatt'ring hopes
I may regain her heart: in this alone
I wiſh to be deceiv'd: ſhew ſome regard,
Some kind compaſſion for a brother's weakneſs:
I muſt believe, thou know'ſt I've too much reaſon,
Thy hatred was a barrier to our love:
Thy malice harden'd Mariamne's heart,
And, but for thee, I had been leſs deteſted.

Sal. Cou'd'ſt thou but know, O! cou'd'ſt thou but conceive
To what exceſs———

Her. Siſter, I'll hear no more:
Let Mariamne threaten; let her take

This loathſome life, for I am weary of it;
So ſhall I periſh by the hand I love.
Sal. It wou'd be cruel to deceive you longer
By guilty ſilence, or conceal her crimes:
I know the dang'rous hazard that I run
By ſerving you; but I muſt ſpeak, tho' death
Were my reward: poor, blind, deluded huſband,
Enſlav'd by love for a vile worthleſs woman;
Know Mariamne now, and know thy ſhame:
'Tis not her pride, her hatred, and diſdain,
Shou'd make thee loath her, but that—ſhe is falſe;
She loves another.
Her. Mariamne love
Another! barb'rous Siſter! to ſuſpect
Her ſpotleſs virtue! Is it thus thou mean'ſt
To murther Herod? Are theſe poiſon'd darts
The beſt farewel that thou can'ſt leave thy brother?
To light up diſcord, ſhame, and rage, and horror,
In my diſtracted mind! Cou'd Mariamne——
But thou already haſt too oft deceiv'd me;
Too long have I giv'n credit to thy falſehood:
Now heav'n has puniſh'd my credulity,
But it has ever been my fate to love
Thoſe who abhor me. You are all my foes;
All ſworn to perſecute the wretched Herod.
Sal. Far from thy ſight then——
Her. Stir not hence, I charge thee;
Another is belov'd! Speak, tell me, who
Muſt fall a ſacrifice to Herod's vengeance?
Purſue thy work, and make my woes complete.
Sal. Since I muſt ſpeak——
Her. Strike here: behold my heart:
Who has diſhonour'd me? Whoe'er he be,
Thou, Salome, perhaps may'ſt anſwer for it,
For thou art guilty: thou haſt undeceiv'd me:
Now at thy peril ſpeak.
Sal. No matter.
Her. Well——
Sal. 'Tis——

SCENE

SCENE VII.

HEROD, SALOME, MAZAEL.

Maz. Bear not this indignity, my lord,
The queen is fled, accompany'd by Varus.
Her. Varus, and Mariamne! gods! where am I?
Maz. Varus, my lord, and all his troops have left
The palace, and a ſecret band is plac'd
About the walls to favour her retreat;
Your Mariamne will be loſt for ever.
Her. The charm is broke, and day ſhines full upon me:
Come, Salome, acknowledge now thy brother,
And know him by his wrath; let us ſurpriſe
The infidel: now judge if Herod ſtill
Acts like himſelf, and like himſelf revenges.

The END of the THIRD ACT.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

SALOME, MAZAEL.

Maz. Never did fair appearance gild ſo well
The ſpecious cov'ring of a happy falſehood:
With what dexterity I play'd on him,
And blended truth with artifice! But why
Art thou dejected? art thou not reſtor'd
To Herod's favour? Mariamne loſt,
Beyond recov'ry loſt? Thou art reveng'd;
The king's diſtracted. I am ſhock'd myſelf
When I behold the work of my own hands:
Thou too haſt ſeen the horrid ſpectacle,

The trembling ſlaves all butcher'd by his hand,
The queen half-dead, and fainting by their ſide,
And Herod's arm uplifted as in act
To murther her: the children bath'd in tears
Fall at his feet, and offer their own lives
To ſave their mother's: can'ſt thou wiſh for more,
Or haſt thou aught to fear?

Sal. I fear the king,
I fear thoſe fatal charms which he adores;
That arm which oft uplifted falls as oft
Inactive down; that anger which ſoon kindled
Is ſoon extinct; which, doubtful ſtill and blind,
Exhauſts its feeble pow'rs in ſudden tranſports:
My triumphs, Mazael, are uncertain ſtill;
Twice has my fate been chang'd this day, and twice
To hatred love ſucceeded: if he ſees
The queen again, we are undone.

SCENE II.

HEROD, SALOME, MAZAEL, GUARDS.

Maz. He comes,
And ſeems diſturb'd: what horror in his aſpect!

Sal. Say, Herod, haſt thou taken ample vengeance?

Maz. I hope my royal maſter will forgive
His faithful ſervant, who thus dares to ſpeak
Touching the queen: but Varus is her ſafe-guard;
Prevent his dark deſigns, and ſave thyſelf:
The haughty prætor, reſolute and bold,
Will make a merit of deſtroying thee.

Her. Alas! my ſiſter, how have I been treated!
Deceiv'd, betray'd! help me to rail, to curſe
This dear ungrateful woman: now my heart
Reſts all its hopes on thy aſſiſting friendſhip:
Thou, Salome, wert made a ſacrifice
To my unhappy love for Mariamne;
I number'd thee amongſt my worſt of foes;
For her unkindneſs did I puniſh thee;

But

But thou haſt ſeen my tenderneſs betray'd,
And, ere this day is paſt, we'll be reveng'd:
Yes, ſhe ſhall ſuffer for her fatal pow'r
O'er Herod's heart, that ſigh'd for her alone.
O how have I ador'd, and how deteſted,
The faithleſs Mariamne! and thou, Varus,
Shalt feel my wrath; thou art a Roman, therefore
Thy life is ſafe; but I can puniſh thee
In blood more precious, and a dearer ſelf:
Thou ſhalt behold the object of thy love,
Who has prefer'd thee to her hated lord,
Thou ſhalt behold her ſoon expire in torment
Before thy eyes: doſt thou not think Auguſtus
Will praiſe my juſt ſeverity?

Sal. No doubt
He will, my lord, and wou'd himſelf adviſe it.
On the ſame altar where his friends adore him,
He ſheds the blood of foes: he teaches kings
To rule and to be fear'd; let Herod mark
And follow his example; thus alone
Thy life can be ſecure: the queen muſt ſtand
Condemn'd by all, and thou be juſtify'd.

Maz. But make good uſe of this important moment,
Whilſt Varus is yet abſent, and his forces
Far from our walls; now ſeize her, and complete
Thy eaſy vengeance.

Sal. Above all conceal
From Iſrael's ſons thy purpoſe and thy grief,
And ſpare thyſelf the horror of a ſight
So dreadful; fly from this unhappy place,
The witneſs of thy ſhame, that muſt recal
A thouſand mournful images; O hide
From ev'ry eye thy ſorrows and thy tears.

Her. No: I muſt ſee her; face to face confound her;
Force her to anſwer; hear her poor excuſes:
I'll make her tremble at th'approach of death,
And aſk that pardon ſhe ſhall ne'er obtain.

Sal. My lord, you will not ſee her?

Her. Fear me not;
Her doom is fix'd: vainly ſhe hopes that love

Will

Will plead her cauſe; my heart is ſhut againſt her:
Thoſe eyes, which once were dang'rous to my peace,
Are harmleſs now; her preſence will but raiſe
My anger, not my love. Guards, bring her hither;
I'll only ſee, and hear, and puniſh her.
Siſter, I wou'd be private for a moment:
[*To the attendants.*
Send Mariamne here: you may retire [*To the guards.*

SCENE III.

HEROD alone.

Art thou reſolv'd to ſee her then? O Herod,
Can'ſt thou depend on thy own treach'rous heart?
Is not her guilt too plain, and have I not
Been baſely injur'd? Why then ſeek for more?
What profit can this interview afford me?
I know her thoughts already, know ſhe hates me;
Why lives ſhe yet? revenge, thou art too ſlow!
Unworthy Herod, coward as thou art,
Go, ſee her, pardon, ſigh again, and court
Your haughty tyrant. No: to-night ſhe dies:
I've ſworn it: th'Aſmonæan blood ſhall flow;
I hate the race, and am abhorr'd by them.
But ſee, ſhe comes, hea'vn! what a mournful ſight!

SCENE IV.

MARIAMNE, HEROD, ELIZA, GUARDS.

Eli. Rouſe up your ſpirits, Madam, 'tis the king.
Mar. Where am I; whither do you lead me? O
'Tis death to look upon him.
Her. How my ſoul
Shudders at ſight of her!

Mar.

Mar. Eliza, help,
Support me, I grow faint.
Eli. This way.
Mar. What torment!
Her. What ſhall I ſay to her? O heav'n!
Mar. Well, Sir,
Your pleaſure. wherefore am I order'd here?
Is it to yield thee up the poor remains
Of hated life, deſtructive to us both?
Take it; ſtrike here; I'll thank thee for the blow;
The only gift I wou'd accept from thee.
Her. Then thou ſhalt have it: but firſt ſpeak, defend,
If poſſible, thy ſhameful flight, and tell me wherefore,
When Herod's heart, to thee alone indulgent,
So oft offended, yet as oft forgave thee,
The partner of my empire and my glory,
What coud'ſt thou purpoſe by ſo black a crime?
Mar. Is that a queſtion fit for thee to aſk?
But 'tis not now a time for vain reproaches;
Yet ſure, my lord, if wretched Mariamne,
Far from theſe walls had ſought ſome kind retreat,
If ſhe for once had dar'd to violate
A huſband's rights, and ſwerve from her obedience,
Think of my royal anceſtors; remember
My ſuff'rings paſt, my preſent danger; think
On theſe, my lord, and blame me if thou dar'ſt.
Her. But when thy guilty paſſion for a traitor,
For Varus———
Mar. Stop thy bold licentious tongue:
My life is thine: but do not cover me
With foul diſhonour; let me paſs at leaſt
Without a bluſh unſpotted to the grave:
Do not forget the ſacred tie that bound us,
That join'd my honour and my fame with thine,
As ſuch I have preſerv'd them: look on me;
Strike here; thou'rt welcome: but remember ſtill
I am thy wife; pay ſome reſpect to me,
And to thyſelf.
Her. O! it becomes thee well
To talk of ſacred ties which thou haſt broke:

Perfidious

Perfidious woman! wou'd not the proud ſcorn
And hatred thou haſt ſhewn alone condemn thee?
Mar. Since thou already haſt decreed my fate,
What wou'd avail my hatred or my love?
What right haſt thou to Mariamne's heart,
Which thou haſt fill'd with ſorrow, and deſpair,
And anguiſh: thou, who, for theſe five years paſt,
Haſt mark'd my days with bitterneſs and woe;
Thou fell deſtroyer of my guiltleſs parents,
Where is my murther'd father? cruel Herod!
O! if thy rage had ſought no blood but mine,
Heav'n be my witneſs, I had lov'd thee ſtill,
And bleſt thee in my lateſt hour: but O!
Do not purſue me, Herod, after death;
Do not extend my woes beyond the grave,
Preſerve my children; do not puniſh them,
Becauſe they're mine, but act a father's part:
Perhaps hereafter thou wilt know their mother;
Perhaps ſhalt one day pity, when too late,
The heart, which, never but by thee ſuſpected,
Cou'd not diſguiſe its griefs; the heart which ſtill
Preſerv'd its virtue, and, but for thyſelf,
Had lov'd thee, Herod.
Her. Ha! what do I hear!
What charm, what ſecret pow'r controuls my rage,
And ſteals me from myſelf? O Mariamne!
Mar. O cruel Herod!
Her. O my fooliſh heart!
Mar. For pity's ſake behold my wretchedneſs,
And take this hated life.
Her. My own is thine,
For ever thine; thou art my Mariamne:
Baniſh thy fears; O thou wer't ſure to triumph
When I beheld thee; make no more excuſes,
Thou art, thou muſt be innocent: I now
Muſt tremble in my turn, and aſk forgiveneſs:
Wilt thou not pardon him who pardon'd thee?
Were our hearts made but to deteſt each other,
To perſecute ourſelves? Let us at once
End all our fears and all our pains together;
Give me thy love, give me thy hand again.

Mar.

Mar. Can'ſt thou deſire this hand? O heav'n thou know'ſt
Herod's is ſtain'd with blood.
Her. It is: I ſlew
Thy father and my king; but wherefore did it?
To reign with thee: and what was my reward?
Thy hatred; a reward I well deſerv'd:
I have no right to murmur or complain;
Thy father's death, and the injuſtice done
To thy unhappy children, are the leaſt
Of Herod's guilt; it reach'd ev'n Mariamne,
And for a moment I deteſted thee;
Nay more, gave ear to ſoul ſuſpicions of thee;
'Twill be the height of virtue to forgive me;
The more my crimes, the more thy ſoul will ſhew
Its greatneſs; thou haſt ſeen my weakneſs for thee,
Take heed that thou abuſe it not; for love
And rage, thou know'ſt, by turns poſſeſs my ſoul;
O give it eaſe: thou turn'ſt aſide thy eyes,
Speak, Mariamne.—
Mar. Such tumultuous tranſports
Can never ſpring, I fear, from true repentance:
Art thou ſincere, and may I truſt thee, Herod?
Her. Thou may'ſt: what is there which thou can'ſt not do?
If thou wilt ceaſe to hate me? 'twas thy ſcorn
That rais'd ſuch furious tempeſts in my ſoul;
It was the loſs of Mariamne's heart
That made me ſavage, barb'rous, and inhuman:
My tears ſhall waſh away the mutual ſtain
Of both our faults: and here I ſwear—

SCENE V.

HEROD, MARIAMNE, ELIZA, a GUARD.

Guard. My lord,
The people are in arms; they have deſtroy'd

The

The ſcaffold rais'd by Salome's command,
And ſlain the officers of juſtice: Varus
Aſſumes the ſov'reign pow'r, he comes this way,
And ev'ry moment we expect him here.
Her. Ha! can it be! thus at the very inſtant
When I was falling at thy feet, to raiſe
Thy minion—
Mar. O my lord, can you believe—
Her. Thou ſeek'ſt my life, and thou ſhalt have it, traitreſs;
But I will drag thee with me to the tomb,
Spite of thyſelf, we there ſhall be united.
A guard there, ſeize, and watch her.

SCENE VI.

HEROD, MARIAMNE, SALOME, MAZAEL, ELIZA, GUARDS.

Sal. O, my brother,
Venture not forth; for the rebellious Hebrews
Are rais'd againſt you, and demand your life;
Repeating ſtill the name of Mariamne:
They come ev'n now to ſeize and take her from thee.
Her. Away. I'll meet them unappall'd: but thou
Shalt anſwer for this inſult: to thy care
I leave her, Salome, guard well thy charge.
Mar. I fear not death, but call high heav'n to witneſs—
Maz. My lord, the Romans are already here.
Her. And muſt I leave the guilty wretch unpuniſh'd?
No: ſhe ſhall bleed: it muſt be ſo: alas!
In my ſad ſtate I can determine nothing;
Death wou'd be welcome; I'll away and meet it.

End of the Fourth Act.

ACT

ACT V. SCENE I.

MARIAMNE, ELIZA, GUARDS.

Mar. SOldiers, retire, and leave your queen at leaſt
The mournful privilege to weep alone.
[*The guards retire to a corner of the ſtage.*
Juſt heav'n! is this at laſt my wretched fate?
My noble blood, my title to a throne,
All that cou'd promiſe years of happineſs,
And days of pleaſure, turn'd to deadly poiſon,
Have fill'd my cup with bitterneſs and woe.
O birth! O youth! and thou deſtructive beauty,
Whoſe dang'rous luſtre but enflam'd my pride,
Flatt'ring deluſion! unſubſtantial ſhade
Of fancy'd bliſs, O how haſt thou deceiv'd me!
Beneath my fatal throne for ever lurk'd
Anguiſh and care, digging the grave that now
Gapes to receive the dying Mariamne.
In Jordan's flood I ſaw my brother periſh,
My father maſſacred by bloody Herod,
Who now has doom'd to death a guiltleſs wife:
My virtue ſtill remain'd, and that the tongue
Of ſlander ſtrives to wound: thou pow'r ſupreme!
Whoſe chaſtiſements ſevere are but the proofs
Of innocence, I aſk not for thy aid,
Nor for thy vengeance; my great anceſtors
Taught me to look on death unmerited
Without a fear: take then my guiltleſs blood,
But O! defend my fame: command the tyrant
To ſpare my mem'ry; let not clam'rous falſehood
Inſult my aſhes: virtue is reveng'd
When ſhe's reſpected. But what new alarm,
What dreadful ſhrieks are theſe? the palace rings
With loud confuſion, and the din of arms:

I am

I am perhaps the cauſe, they fight for me:
They force the doors: ha! what do I ſee?

SCENE II.

MARIAMNE, VARUS, ELISA, ALBINUS, SOLDIERS.

Var. Away:
Hence ruffians; you who hold your queen in bondage,
Vile Hebrews, hence:—you, Romans, do your office.
[*Herod's guards go off, chain'd by Varus's ſoldiers.*
Now, Mariamne, thou art free; thou ſee'ſt
The tyrant cou'd not bar my entrance here:
Mazael lies bath'd in his perfidious blood;
At leaſt my arm hath half aveng'd the cauſe
Of injur'd majeſty: haſte, Mariamne,
Seize the propitious moment, and ſecure
A ſhelter from the ſtorm: let us begone.
Mar. My lord, I cannot now accept thy bounty;
After the vile reproach which Herod caſt
On my fair fame, I ſhou'd indeed deſerve it,
Were I imprudent to receive the aid
Thou proffer'ſt: I have much more cauſe to dread
Thy kindneſs now than his barbarity;
'Twou'd be diſgraceful thus to owe my life
To Varus; honour ſays ev'n this is guilt,
And death alone can expiate my offence.
Var. What woud'ſt thou do? alas! unhappy princeſs,
A moment may deſtroy thee: the time preſſes;
Still we're in arms, and Herod may ſucceed:
Doſt thou not fear his rage and his deſpair?
Mar. No: I fear nought but ſhame; and know my duty.
Var. Am I then doom'd for ever to offend you?
But I will do the work of vengeance for thee,
Spite of thyſelf: once more I'll to the field;

And,

And, if the tyrant come acroſs me there,
This arm——
Mar. Stop, Varus; I deteſt a triumph
So dearly bought: know, Sir, the life of Herod
Demands my care: his rights——
Var. Are forfeited
By his ingratitude.
Mar. The ſacred tye——
Var. Is broken.
Mar. Duty hath united us.
Var. But guilt divorces; therefore do not ſtay me,
Revenge thyſelf, and ſave ſo many virtues.
Mar. Thou woud'ſt diſgrace them.
Var. He wou'd take thy life.
Mar. Yet his is ſacred ſtill to Mariamne.
Var. He kill'd thy father.
Mar. Varus, I know well
What Herod did, and what I ought to do.
Patient, I'll wait the fury of the ſtorm,
Nor by his crimes wou'd juſtify my own.
Var. O noble, brave, unconquerable heart!
Ye gods, how many virtues have conſpir'd
To ſwell this tyrant's guilt! O Mariamne!
The more thou ſhalt diſclaim my proffer'd ſervice,
The more am I reſolv'd to diſobey thee.
Thy honour diſapproves what mine commands:
But nought ſhall ſtop me, nought intimidate:
I go to ſearch the tyrant, and repair
The hours I've loſt in not revenging thee.
Mar. My lord—

SCENE III.

MARIAMNE, ELISA, GUARDS.

Mar. He's gone, and wou'd not hear me: heav'n
Let not more blood be ſhed; O ſpare my ſubjects;
Pour all thy wrath on me, and ſpare ev'n Herod!

SCENE

SCENE IV.

MARIAMNE, ELIZA, NABAL, GUARDS.

Mar. O Nabal, art thou here? what haſt thou done
With my dear children? where's my mother?
Nab. Safe:
The wrath of Herod reaches not to them:
Thou art the only object of his fury,
Which kindles at the hateful name of Varus:
If he is conquer'd, Mariamne dies.
The barb'rous Zares is already ſent
With ſecret orders hither; thou may'ſt gueſs
The purport, therefore now exert thy pow'r:
The people love thee; on their royal zeal
Thou may'ſt rely; the ſight of thee will raiſe
Their drooping hearts; let 'em behold thee: fly,
My royal miſtreſs, let us call the prieſts,
All Judah's ſons will riſe to guard the race
Of their lov'd kings: at length the hour is come,
To conquer or to die: let me intreat thee——
Mar. True courage lies in knowing how to ſuffer,
And not in ſtirring up rebellious crouds
Againſt their ſov'reign: I ſhou'd bluſh to think,
That, anxious for itſelf, my fearful heart
Had ever form'd a wiſh for his deſtruction,
Or rais'd my hopes of ſafety on his death:
No: heav'n this moment has inſpir'd my breaſt
With rage leſs guilty, and a nobler purpoſe:
Herod ſuſpects me, he ſhall know me now;
I'll ruſh into the battle; ſtrive to part
The king and Varus; caſt myſelf before
My huſband's feet, and yield him up my life.
I fled this morning from that dreadful vengeance
Which now I ſearch for: baniſh'd by his crimes,
His danger has recall'd me: honour bids,
And I obey: I go to ſave his life
Who thirſts for mine.

Nab.

Nab. Alas! to what extremes——
Mar. I'm loſt: 'tis Herod.

SCENE V.

HEROD, MARIAMNE, ELIZA, NABAL, IDAMAS, GUARDS.

Her. Did they ſee each other?
Now, faithleſs wretch, thou dy'ſt.
Mar. Do not, my lord,
'Tis the laſt boon that I ſhall crave; O do not——
Her. Begone—guards, follow her.
[*Guards carry off* Mariamne.
Nab. Eternal juſtice!

SCENE VI.

HEROD, IDAMAS, GUARDS.

Her. Let me not hear her nam'd: perfidious woman!
Well, my brave ſoldiers, are there yet more foes?
Ida. The Romans are ſubdued; the Hebrews bend
Once more ſubmiſſive to the yoke; and Varus,
Cover'd with wounds, to thy victorious arm
Gives up the field: O thou haſt gain'd this day
Eternal glory; but the prætor's blood,
Shed by thy hand, will draw on thee the vengeance
Of proud offended Rome: a crime like this—
Her. And now for my revenge on Mariamne.
Unworthy of my love I caſt her from me,
And from this moment ſhall begin to reign.
O! I was blind, that fond deſtructive paſſion
Was Herod's only weakneſs: let her dye:
Let me forget her charms, and her remembrance

Be

Be blotted now for ever from my ſoul.
Are all things ready for the execution?
Ida. They are, my lord.
Her. How quickly they obey me!
Unhappy Herod! muſt ſhe periſh then?
Did'ſt thou ſay, Idamas, 'twas ready all?
Ida. The guards have ſeiz'd her perſon, and too ſoon
Thy vengeance will be ſatisfied.
Her. She courted
Her own deſtruction, and oblig'd me to it:
But ſhe is gone: I'll think no more on't: Oh!
I cou'd have liv'd and dy'd with Mariamne:
To what haſt thou compell'd me?

SCENE the laſt.

HEROD, IDAMAS, NABAL.

Her. Nabal, ha!
Whither ſo faſt? juſt heaven! and in tears!
How my ſoul ſhakes with dreadful apprehenſion.
Nab. My lord—
Her. What wou'd thou ſay?
Nab. My feeble voice
Dies on my trembling lips.
Her. O Mariamne!
Nab. Superfluous ſorrow!
Her. Ha! 'tis paſt then, is it?
Nab. She is no more.
Her. Ha! dead! great God!
Nab. My lord,
Permit me, 'tis a debt I owe to thee,
Due to her mem'ry, to her virtues due,
To ſhew thee what a treaſure thou haſt loſt,
The worth of that dear blood which thou haſt ſhed:
Know, Herod, ſhe was never faithleſs to thee;
But, ev'n whilſt Varus fought for her, refus'd

His

His offer'd hand, ſlighted his ardent vows,
And hazarded her life to ſuccour thee.
Her. What do I hear? O wretched Herod! Nabal,
What haſt thou told me?
Nab. In that very moment,
Ev'n when her gen'rous heart inſpir'd her laſt
And nobleſt act, thy cruel orders came,
And ſhe was led to death: thy barb'rous ſiſter
Urg'd on her fate.
Her. Inhuman Salome;
Why did my juſtice ſpare that cruel monſter?
What puniſhments muſt be reſerv'd for thee!
But let thy blood and mine—Nabal, go on,
And kill me with the melancholy tale.
Nab. How ſhall I ſpeak the reſt! the guard, thou know'ſt,
By thee directed, led her hence: ſhe follow'd
Without a murmur or reproach of thee;
Without affected pride, or real fear:
On her fair front ſate graceful majeſty,
Temper'd with ſoftneſs; modeſt innocence
And heart-felt virtue ſparkled in her eyes;
Her ſorrows gave new luſtre to her charms;
Prieſts, Hebrews, all, with tears and ſhrieks beſought her:
The ſoldiers call'd for death, and wept the fate
Of Mariamne—and of Herod too;
For deep, they cry'd aloud, wou'd be thy grief,
And horror and remorſe attend thee ever.
Her. How ev'ry word ſtrikes to my heart!
Nab. She felt
For their diſtreſs, and as ſhe paſs'd along,
Spake comfort to them. To the fatal ſcaffold
At length ſhe came; there lifted up her hands,
Loaded with ſhameful chains, and thus ſhe ſpake;
'Farewel, unhappy king; Herod, farewel!
'Thy dying Mariamne weeps for thee,
'And thee alone; may this be thy laſt act
'Of foul injuſtice! may thy reign henceforth
'Be happy! Take my people to thy care;
'Protect my children; love and cheriſh them;

'And

'And I ſhall dye content.' She ſpake, and bent
Her beauteous body to the axe; I ſaw,
And wept her fall.
Her. Then Mariamne's dead;
And Herod lives: thou dear, and honoured ſhade!
Ye poor remains of all that once was fair
And good, and virtuous, to the ſilent grave
Soon will I follow thee—Ye ſhall not ſtop me,
Perfidious ſubjects: from my murth'rous hand,
Why will ye wreſt my ſword? O Mariamne!
Come now, and be reveng'd: tear forth this heart
That bleeds for thee. I faint, I dye. [*He faints.*
Nab. His ſenſes
Are loſt; his grief o'erpow'rs him.
Her. What thick clouds
O'erſpread my troubled ſoul! deep melancholy
Weighs down my ſenſes; why am I abandon'd,
Left to my ſorrows thus? No ſiſter here;
No Mariamne! How you ſtand and weep
At diſtance from me! Dare you not approach me!
All Judah flies before her wretched king.
What have I done? why am I thus abhorr'd?
Who will relieve me? who will ſooth my grief?
Fetch Mariamne to me.
Nab. Mariamne,
My lord!
Her. Ay, bring her; for I know the ſight
Of her will calm at once my agony:
When Mariamne's with me, my bleſs'd hours
Are all ſerene, and life glides ſweetly on:
Methinks her very name hath heal'd my woes,
And leſſen'd my affliction: let her come.
Nab. My lord—
Her. I'll ſee her.
Nab. Sir, have you forgot
That Mariamne's dead?
Her. What ſay'ſt thou?
Nab. Grief
Tranſports him; his mind's hurt; he's not himſelf.
Her. Ha! Mariamne dead! deſtructive reaſon,
Why com'ſt thou now to tell me this ſad truth?

Down

Down with theſe hateful walls, this fatal palace,
Stain'd with her blood, and let its ruins hide
Th' accurſed place where Mariamne periſh'd!
Is ſhe then dead, and I her murtherer!
Puniſh this parricide, this horrid monſter:
Tear him in pieces you who weep her loſs,
My ſubjects; and thou, heav'n, who haſt her now,
Send down thy vengeful light'nings, and deſtroy me.

End of the Fifth and laſt Act.

BRUTUS.

A

TRAGEDY.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS tragedy was exhibited for the firſt time in 1730. It met with leſs ſucceſs than any of our author's pieces in the repreſentation, having been played only ſixteen nights. It has notwithſtanding been tranſlated into more languages, and more admired by foreigners than moſt of his tragedies. The preſent edition of it differs greatly from the former.

A

DISCOURSE

ON

TRAGEDY:

In a LETTER to Lord BOLINBROKE.

On rhime. On the difficulty of French verſification. Examples of it. Tragedies in proſe. Rhime pleaſes the French even in comedy. Character of the Engliſh theatre. Faults of the French. The Engliſh Cato. Compariſon of the Manlius of M. De la Foſſe with the Venice preſerv'd of Otway. Examen of Shakeſpear's Julius Cæſar. Horrible ſpectacles amongſt the Greeks. The obſervation of decorum and the unities. Fifth act of Rodogune. The pomp and dignity of the tragic Scene. Advice of an excellent critic. On love.

MY LORD,

I HAVE here dedicated a French work, repreſented at Paris, to an Engliſh patron; not becauſe there are not in my own country many men of diſtinguiſh'd parts and judgment, to whom I might have paid that compliment; but becauſe

the tragedy of Brutus is as it were a native of England. Your lordſhip may remember, that when I retir'd to Wandſworth with my friend, Mr. Fakener, that worthy and virtuous citizen, I employ'd my leiſure hours at his houſe in writing the firſt act of this piece in Engliſh proſe, pretty nearly the ſame as it now ſtands in French verſe. I mention'd it to your lordſhip ſeveral times, and we were both equally ſupriz'd, that no * Engliſhman had ever treated this ſubject, which ſeems peculiarly adapted to your theatre. You encouraged me to purſue a plan which wou'd admit of ſuch noble ſentiments; permit me therefore, my lord, to inſcribe this work to your lordſhip, tho' not written in your own tongue; to you, my lord,

Docte ſermones utriuſque linguæ.

you, who are able to inſtruct me in French as well as Engliſh; you, who at leaſt have taught me to give my own language that force and energy, which freedom of thought can alone inſpire: for the vigorous ſentiments of the heart paſs inſenſibly into our expreſſions, and he who thinks nobly will always ſpeak ſo.

I muſt

* In the firſt editions of this tragedy, no notice was taken of Lee's Brutus; but the fact roundly aſſerted, that no Engliſhman had ever treated this ſubject: in the edition however, now before us, Mr. Voltaire, or ſomebody for him, has ſubjoin'd the following note:

'There is a Brutus by an author whoſe name is Lee, but it is a piece intirely unknown, and never play'd.'

Mr. V. muſt have had very little acquaintance with the Engliſh ſtage, not to know that 'l'auteur nommé Lee,' the author whoſe name was Lee, is one of our favorite dramatic writers; and though wild and extravagant, was poſſeſs'd of fine abilities.

Spirat tragicum ſatis & feliciter audet.

His Lucius Junius Brutus, though inferior in conduct to Voltaire's, has many fine and maſterly ſtrokes in it.

I muſt own, my lord, on my return from England, where I had paſſed almoſt two years in the continual ſtudy of your language, I found myſelf at a loſs when I ſet about a French tragedy. I was accuſtom'd almoſt to think in Engliſh, and perceiv'd that the French idioms did not preſent themſelves to my imagination with that facility as they had formerly: it was like a rivulet, whoſe current had been turn'd another way; ſome time and pains were requiſite to make it flow again in its proper channel. I began then to be convinc'd, that to ſucceed in any art, we muſt cultivate it all our lives.

What deterr'd me more than any thing from works of this kind, was the ſevere rules of our poetry, and the ſlavery of rhime. I regretted that happy liberty which you enjoy of writing tragedy in blank verſe; of lengthening out, or ſhortening almoſt all your words; of running one verſe into another; and, upon occaſion, coining new expreſſions; which are generally adopted, if they ſound well, and are uſeful, and intelligible. An Engliſh poet, ſaid I, is a freeman, who can ſubject his language to his genius; whilſt the Frenchman is a ſlave to rhime, oblig'd ſometimes to make four verſes to expreſs a ſentiment, that an Engliſhman can give you in one. An Engliſhman ſays what he will; a Frenchman only what he can. One runs along a large and open field, whilſt the other walks in ſhackles, through a narrow and ſlippery road: but, in ſpite of all theſe reflections and complaints, we can never ſhake off the yoke of rhime; it is abſolutely eſſential to French poetry. Our language will not admit of inverſions; nor our verſes bear to be run one into another: our ſyllables never can produce a ſenſible harmony, by their long or

ſhort meaſures: our cæſuras, and a certain number of feet, wou'd not be ſufficient to diſtinguiſh proſe from verſe; rhime is therefore indiſpenſibly neceſſary: beſides, that ſo many of our great maſters, who have written in rhime, ſuch as Corneille, Racine, and Deſpreaux, have ſo accuſtom'd our ears to this kind of harmony, that we cou'd never bear any other; and I once more therefore inſiſt upon it, that whoever can be abſurd enough, to ſhake of a burthen which the great Corneille was oblig'd to carry, wou'd be look'd upon, and with great reaſon, not as a bold and enterpriſing genius, ſtriking out into a new road, but as a weak and impotent writer, who had not ſtrength to ſupport himſelf in the old path.

Some have attempted to give us tragedies in proſe; but it is a thing which, I believe, can never ſucceed. Thoſe who already have much, are ſeldom contented with a little; and he will always be a very unwelcome gueſt to the public, who ſays, I come to leſſen your pleaſure. If, in the midſt of Paul Veroneſe or Rubens's pictures, any one ſhou'd come and place his ſketches with a pencil, wou'd he have any right to compare himſelf with thoſe great artiſts? We are us'd at feaſts to dancing and ſinging, wou'd it be enough on theſe occaſions merely for us to walk and ſpeak, only under the pretence that we walked and ſpoke well, and that it was more eaſy, and more natural?

It is moſt probable, that verſe will always be made uſe of in tragedy, and rhime in our own: It is even to this conſtraint of rhime, and the extreme ſeverity of our verſification, that we are indebted for the moſt excellent performances in our language. We require in our rhimes that they

they ſhould never prejudice the ſentiment; that they ſhou'd never be trivial, nor labour'd; and are ſo rigorous as to expect the ſame purity, and the ſame exactneſs in verſe, as in proſe. We don't permit the leaſt licence; we force our authors to carry all the chains without breaking one link, at the ſame time to appear entirely free, and never acknowledge any as poets who have not fulfill'd all theſe conditions.

Such are the reaſons, why it is more eaſy to make a hundred verſes in any other language, than four in French. The example of Abbè Regnier Deſmarais, of the French academy, and alſo of the academy of La Cruſca, is a ſufficient proof of this. He tranſlated Anacreon into Italian with great ſucceſs; and yet his French verſes, except a few of them, are but very indifferent. It was nearly the ſame with Menage. How many of our men of genius have made excellent Latin verſes, and written others in their own language which were inſupportable!

Many diſputes have I had in England about our verſification: what reproaches have I heard from the learned * Biſhop of Rocheſter for this childiſh conſtraint, which, he us'd to ſay, we ridiculouſly laid upon ourſelves, out of mere wantonneſs and levity: but depend upon it, my lord, the more a ſtranger knows of our language, the ſooner will he reconcile himſelf to that rhime which is at firſt ſo formidable to him. It is not only neceſſary to our tragedies, but is even an ornament to our comedies themſelves. A good thing in verſe is more eaſily retain'd: the various pictures of human life will be always more ſtriking in verſe, (when a Frenchman ſays verſe, he always means rhime) and we have

* The celebrated Dr. Atterbury.

comedies in proſe, by the celebrated Moliere, which we have been obliged to put into verſe after his death, and which are never play'd but in their new dreſs.

Not daring therefore, my lord, to hazard on the French theatre that kind of verſe which is uſed in Italy and in England, I have endeavour'd at leaſt to tranſplant into our ſcene ſome of the beauties of yours; at the ſame time I am ſufficiently ſatisfy'd, that the Engliſh theatre is extremely defective. I have heard you ſay you have not one good tragedy; but to make you amends, in thoſe wild pieces which you have, there are ſome admirable ſcenes. Hitherto there has been wanting, in all the tragic authors of your nation, that purity, that regular conduct, that decorum in the action and ſtile, and all thoſe ſtrokes of art which have eſtabliſh'd the reputation of the French theatre ſince the time of the great Corneille: though, at the ſame time, it muſt be acknowledged, that your moſt irregular pieces have very great merit with regard to the action.

We have in France ſome tragedies in high repute, which are rather converſations than the repreſentation of an event. An Italian author, in a letter on the theatres, writes thus to me:* 'Un cretico del noſtro Paſtor Fido diſſo che quel 'componimento era un riaſſunto di belliſſimi 'madrigali; credo, ſe viveſſe, che direbbe delle 'tragedie Franceſe che ſono un riaſſunto di belle 'elegie, e ſontuoſi epitalami.'

I am afraid there is but too much truth in what my Italian friend ſays; our extenſive delicacy obliges

* 'i. e. A critic on our Paſtor Fido ſays, that work is nothing 'but a collection of the moſt beautiful madrigals: I believe, if he 'was now living, he wou'd ſay of the French tragedies, that they 'were a collection of fine elegies, and ſounding epithalamiums.'

obliges us frequently to put into narration, what we wou'd gladly have brought before the eyes of the ſpectator: but we are afraid to hazard on the ſcene new ſpectacles, before a people accuſtom'd to turn into ridicule every thing which they are not uſed to.

The place where our comedies are acted, and the abuſes which have crept into it, is another cauſe of that dryneſs which appears in ſome of our pieces. The benches on the ſtage, appropriated to the ſpectators, confine the ſcene, and make all action almoſt impracticable: and this is the reaſon why the decorations, ſo highly recommended by the antients, are with us ſeldom well adapted to the piece: and above all, it prevents the actors from paſſing out of one apartment into the other in ſight of the ſpectators; as was the ſenſible practice of the Greeks and Romans, to preſerve at once unity of place and probability.

How, for inſtance, cou'd we dare, on our theatre, to bring on the ghoſt of Pompey, or the genius of Brutus, amongſt a croud of young fellows, who ſeldom look upon the moſt ſerious things but with a view to ſhew their wit by a *bon mot* on the occaſion? how could we produce before them the body of Marcus, and Cato, his father, crying out,

Who wou'd not be that youth? what pity is it
That we can die but once to ſerve our country!
Why mourn you thus? let not a private loſs
Afflict your hearts: 'tis Rome requires our tears;
The miſtreſs of the world, the ſeat of empire,
The nurſe of heroes, the delight of gods,
That humbled the proud tyrants of the earth
And ſet the nations free. Rome is no more.
O liberty! O virtue! O my country!

This

This is what the late Mr. Addiſon took the liberty to do at London. This Cato was tranſlated into Italian, and play'd in ſeveral parts of Italy: but if we were to hazard ſuch a ſpectacle at Paris, you wou'd hear the parterre roaring out, and obſerve the women turning their heads away.

You can't imagine how far we carry this delicacy. The author of our tragedy of Manlius took his ſubject from the Engliſh piece, wrote by Otway, call'd, Venice Preſerv'd. The plot is taken from the hiſtory of the conſpiracy of the marquis de Bedemar, written by the Abbé de St. Rèal. Permit me to obſerve by the way, that this ſhort piece of hiſtory is much ſuperior both to Otway's piece, and our own Manlius. Firſt you may remark the prejudice that oblig'd the French author to diſguiſe a known fact under Roman names, whilſt the Engliſh writer made uſe of the real ones. The London theatre ſaw nothing ridiculous in a Spaniſh ambaſſador's being call'd Bedemar, or the conſpirators Jaffier, Pierre, and Elliot: this alone in France wou'd have been ſufficient to ruin the performance. But Otway aſſembles the conſpirators; Renaud makes them all take their oaths; aſſigns to each of them his poſt; appoints the hour to begin the maſſacre; and every now and then caſts an eye of diffidence and ſuſpicion on Jaffier, whom he miſtruſts. He makes a pathetic addreſs to them all, which is tranſlated word for word from St. Real: "Jamais repos ſi profonde ne preceda un trouble ſi grand," &c.

But what has the French author done? afraid to produce ſo many perſons on the ſtage, he only relates by Renaud, under the name of Rutilus, an inconſiderable part of that ſpeech which he tells

tells us he had made to the conſpirators. One may perceive by this circumſtance alone, how ſuperior the Engliſh ſcene is to the French, however faulty Otway's piece may be in every other reſpect.

With what pleaſure have I ſeen at London your tragedy of Julius Cæſar, which for theſe hundred and fifty years paſt has been the delight of your nation! not that I approve the barbarous irregularities which it abounds with: it only aſtoniſhes me, that there are not many more in a work written in an age of ignorance, by a man who did not even underſtand * Latin, and had no inſtructor but his own genius: and yet, amongſt ſo many groſs faults, with what rapture did I behold Brutus, holding in his hand a dagger, ſtill wet with the blood of Cæſar, aſſemble the Roman people, and thus harangue them from the tribunal:

'Romans, countrymen, and friends, if there 'be any in this aſſembly, any dear friend of 'Cæſar's, to him I ſay that Brutus's love to 'Cæſar was no leſs than his. If then that 'friend demand, why Brutus roſe againſt Cæſar, 'this is my anſwer: Not that I lov'd Cæſar 'leſs, but that I lov'd Rome more. Had you 'rather Cæſar were living, and die all ſlaves; 'than that Cæſar were dead, to live all free-'men? As Cæſar lov'd me, I weep for him; as 'he was fortunate, I rejoice at it; as he was 'valiant, I honour him; but as he was ambi-'tious, I ſlew him. Who's here ſo baſe that 'wou'd be a bondman? if any, ſpeak, for him 'have I offended. Who is here ſo rude that 'wou'd

* Mr. V. wou'd find it difficult to prove that Shakeſpear did not underſtand Latin, and ſtill more ſo, to convince us that the age he lived in was an age of ignorance.

'wou'd not be a Roman? if any, ſpeak, for him 'have I offended. Who is here ſo vile that will 'not love his country? if any, ſpeak, for him 'have I offended.

'*All.* None, Brutus, none.

'*Brutus.* Then none have I offended. Here 'comes his body, mourn'd by Mark Antony; 'who, though he had no hand in his death, ſhall 'receive the benefit of his dying, a place in the 'common-wealth; as which of you ſhall not. 'With this I depart, that as I ſlew my beſt lover 'for the good of Rome, I have the ſame dagger 'for myſelf, when it ſhall pleaſe my country to 'need my death.'

'*All.* Live, Brutus, live.'

After this ſcene Antony comes to excite the compaſſion of thoſe very Romans whom Brutus had juſt before inſpir'd with his own rigour and barbarity. Antony, by an artful diſcourſe, leads back as it were inſenſibly theſe haughty ſpirits, and when he ſees them ſoften'd a little, ſhews them the body of Cæſar; and making uſe of the moſt pathetic figures of rhetoric, excites them to ſedition and revenge. The French, perhaps, wou'd never ſuffer on their ſtage a chorus compos'd of Roman artiſans and plebeians; wou'd never permit the bleeding body of Cæſar to be expos'd in public; or the people to be excited to rebellion by an harangue from the tribunal: cuſtom alone, who is the queen of this world, can change the taſte of nations, and make the objects of our averſion pleaſing and agreeable.

The Greeks produc'd ſpectacles on the ſtage that appear not leſs ſhocking and abſurd to us. Hippolitus, bruis'd with his fall, comes on to count his wounds, and make hideous lamentations. Philoctetes falls into a trance, occaſion'd by

by the violence of his pains, and the black blood flows from his wound. Oedipus, cover'd with blood that drops from the remaining part of his eyes, which he had been juſt tearing out, complains both of gods and men. We hear the ſhrieks of Clytemnæſtra, murder'd by her own ſon; and Electra cries out from the ſtage, 'ſtrike, ſpare her not, ſhe did not ſpare our father.' Prometheus is faſten'd to a rock, by nails drove into his arms and ſtomach. The furies anſwer the bloody ghoſt of Clytemnæſtra by horrid and inarticulate noiſes. In ſhort, many of the Greek tragedies are fill'd with terror of this kind, that is to the laſt degree extravagant. The Greek tragedians, in other reſpects ſuperior to the Engliſh, were certainly wrong in often miſtaking horror for terror; and the diſguſtful and incredible for the tragic and the marvellous. The art was in its infancy at Athens in the time of Æſchylus, as at London in the time of Shakeſpear: but amidſt all the faults, both of the Greek and Engliſh poets, we find ſingular beauties and the true pathetic; and if any of my countrymen, who have no other knowledge of the manners and tragedies of their neighbours, but what they get from tranſlations and hear-ſays, condemn them without reſtriction: they are, in my opinion, like ſo many blind men, who ſhou'd aſſure us that a roſe cou'd not have lively colours, becauſe they felt the thorns at the end of their fingers: but if the Greeks and you have both paſs'd the bounds of decorum, and the Engliſh more particularly abound in the frightful inſtead of the terrible, we, on the other hand, as over ſcrupulous as you have been raſh, for fear of going too far, ſtop too ſhort, and very often fail of reaching the tragic, for fear of going beyond it.

I am

I am far from propoſing, that the ſtage ſhou'd be a ſcene of blood-ſhed, as it is in Shakeſpear, and many of his ſucceſſors, who, without his genius, have imitated his faults; but I dare believe, that there are ſome certain circumſtances and ſituations, which at preſent appear ſhocking and diſguſtful to a French audience, that, if well conducted, repreſented with art, and above all ſoften'd by the charms of good verſe, might give us a ſpecies of pleaſure we are as yet unacquainted with, which notwithſtanding may certainly be attain'd.

* Il n'eſt point de ſerpent ni de monſtre odieux
Qui par l'art imité ne puiſſe plaire aux yeux.

At leaſt I ſhou'd wiſh to be inform'd, why our Heroes and Heroines ſhou'd be permitted to kill themſelves and nobody elſe: is the ſcene leſs bloody by the death of Athaliah, who ſtabs herſelf for her lover, than it wou'd be by the murther of Cæſar? And if the ſight of Cato's ſon, brought in dead before his father, gives that old Roman an opportunity of making an excellent ſpeech on the occaſion; if this part of Cato was admir'd both in England and in Italy, even by the greateſt partiſans of French decorum; if the moſt delicate of the fair ſex were not in the leaſt ſhock'd at it; why may not the French bring themſelves to it by uſe? Is not nature the ſame in all mankind?

All theſe laws of baniſhing murther from the ſtage; of not ſuffering more than three perſons to ſpeak,

* i. e. There is no ſerpent, or odious monſter, but, if well imitated by art, may be made agreeable to the eye.

The French lines are taken from Boileau's art of poetry.

ſpeak, &c. are ſuch as, in my opinion, might admit of ſome exceptions amongſt us, as they did amongſt the Greeks. It is not with the rules of decorum, that are always a little arbitrary, as it is with the fundamental laws of the theatre, which are the three unities; it would be a mark of weakneſs and ſterility to extend an action beyond that degree of ſpace and time which are ſuitable to it. Aſk any man, who has crouded too many events into his piece, what is the reaſon of this fault, and, if he has ſincerity enough, he will fairly confeſs, that he had not a ſufficient ſhare of genius to fill up his performance with a ſingle action: and if he takes up two days, and places his ſcene in two different places, you may take it for granted, it is becauſe he has not ſkill enough to confine his plan within the limits of three hours, or bring it into the walls of a palace, as probability requires he ſhou'd. But it is quite another thing with regard to hazarding a horrible ſpectacle on the ſtage; this wou'd not in the leaſt ſhock probability: a boldneſs like this, far from implying any weakneſs in the author, wou'd, on the contrary, demand a great genius to give his verſes true grandeur in an action, which, without ſublimity or ſtile, wou'd appear ſavage and diſguſtful.

This was what our great Corneille once attempted in his Rodogune. He brings upon the ſtage a mother, who, in the preſence of an ambaſſador and the whole court, wants to poiſon her ſon and her daughter-in-law, after having killed her other ſon with her own hand. She preſents them the poiſon'd cup, and on their refuſing to taſte it, occaſion'd by their ſuſpicions of her, drinks it herſelf, and dies by the poiſon which ſhe had deſign'd for them. Strokes ſo terrible as

theſe ſhou'd be very rare; it is not every one who ſhou'd dare to ſtrike them. Such novelties require great circumſpection, and a maſterly hand in the execution. The Engliſh themſelves allow that Shakeſpear, for example, was the only poet who cou'd call up ghoſts, and make them ſpeak with ſucceſs.

Within that circle none durſt move but he.

The more majeſtic and full of terror a theatrical action is, the more inſipid wou'd it become, if it were often repeated: in the ſame manner as details of battles, which, being in their own nature every thing that is terrible, become dry and tedious, by appearing often in hiſtory. The only piece of Racine, where there is any ſpectacle, is his maſter-piece, Athaliah: there we ſee a child on the throne, his nurſe and the prieſts attending him, a queen who commands her ſoldiers to maſſacre him, and the Levites running to take up arms in his defence: the whole of this action is pathetic: and yet, if the ſtile was not ſo too, it wou'd appear childiſh and ridiculous.

The more we ſtrike the eye with ſplendid appearances, the ſtronger obligation do we lay ourſelves under of ſupporting them by ſublimity of diction; otherwiſe the writer will only be conſider'd as a decorator, and not as a tragic poet. It is near thirty years ſince the tragedy of Montezuma was repreſented at Paris; the ſcene open'd with a ſpectacle intirely new: a palace in a magnificent but barbarous taſte; Montezuma in a dreſs very ſingular and uncommon; at the end of the ſtage a number of his ſlaves, arm'd with bows and arrows according to the cuſtom of their country; round the king were eight grandees of his court

court proſtrate on the earth, with their faces to the ground; Montezuma begins the piece with theſe words:

Ariſe, your king permits you on this day
To look on, and to ſpeak to him.

The ſpectacle charm'd the ſpectators, but nothing elſe gave the leaſt pleaſure throughout the whole tragedy.

With regard to myſelf I muſt own, it was not without fear that I introduc'd on our ſtage the Roman ſenate in ſcarlet robes delivering their opinions. I recollected, that when I brought into my Oedipus a Chorus of Thebans, ſaying,

Strike, ſtrike, ye gods, O death deliver us,
And we will thank you for the boon——

The parterre, inſtead of being ſtruck with the pathetic in this paſſage, only felt the abſurdity, if any ſuch there were, of putting theſe verſes into the mouth of raw actors, not much us'd to choruſſes, and immediately ſet up a loud laugh. This prevented me from making the ſenators in Brutus ſpeak, when Titus is accuſed before them, or heightening the terror of the incident by expreſſing the aſtoniſhment and grief of theſe reverend fathers of their country, who, no doubt, ought to have ſignify'd their ſurpriſe in another manner than by dumb ſhew: but they did not do even ſo much as this.

The Engliſh are more fond of action than we are, and ſpeak more to the eye: the French give more attention to elegance, harmony, and the charms of verſe. It is certainly more difficult to write

write well, than to bring upon the ſtage, aſſaſſinations, wheels, mechanical powers, ghoſts, and ſorcerers. The tragedy of Cato, which reflects ſo much honour on Mr. Addiſon, your ſucceſſor in the miniſtry, I have heard you ſay, owes its great reputation to its fine poetry; that is to ſay, to juſt and noble ſentiments expreſs'd in harmonious verſes. It is theſe detach'd beauties that ſupport poetical performances, and hand them down to poſterity. It is only a peculiar manner of ſaying common things; it is the art of embelliſhing by diction what all men think and feel that conſtitutes the true poet. There are no refin'd or ſtrain'd ſentiments, no romantic adventures in the fourth book of Virgil; all is natural; and yet it is the higheſt effort of human genius. Mr. Racine is only ſuperior to all thoſe who have ſaid the ſame things as himſelf, becauſe he hath ſaid them better: and Corneille is never truly great, but when he expreſſes himſelf as well as he thinks. Let us remember this precept of Deſpreaux.

* 'Et que tout ce qu'il dit, facile à retenir,
'De ſon ouvrage en vous laiſſe un long ſouvenir.'

This is greatly wanting in many of our dramatic performances, which the art of an actor, or the figure and voice of an actreſs, have carry'd off with ſucceſs on our ſtage. How many ill-written pieces have been acted oftener than Cinna and Britannicus! tho' nobody ever retain'd two lines

of

* i. e. 'Let every thing he ſays be eaſy to retain, that it may 'leave with you a long remembrance of the work.'
For the French lines ſee Boileau's art of poetry.

of any of theſe poor pieces, and at the ſame time Britannicus and Cinna are got by heart. In vain did the Regulus of Pradon draw tears from the ſpectators by ſome moving incidents: the work itſelf, with all thoſe that reſemble it, are ſunk into contempt, whilſt the authors pay themſelves a thouſand compliments in their prefaces to them.

Some judicious criticks will perhaps aſk me, why I brought love into the tragedy of Junius Brutus; and why I have mingled that paſſion with the auſtere virtue of a Roman ſenate, and the political intrigues of an ambaſſador: our nation is reproach'd for enervating the ſcene by too much tenderneſs; and the Engliſh, at leaſt for this laſt age, have deſerv'd the ſame cenſure; or you have always follow'd a little our modes, and our vices: but will you permit me to give you my opinion on this head?

To exact love in every tragedy ſhews an effeminate taſte: and intirely to proſcribe and baniſh it from the theatre is equally unreaſonable and ridiculous. The ſtage, either in tragedy or comedy, is a lively picture of the human paſſions: one perhaps repreſents the ambition of a prince, the other ridicules the vanity of a cit. Here you laugh at the coquetry and intrigues of a citizen's lady; there you weep the unhappy paſſion of Phædra: love amuſes you in a romance, or charms you in the Dido of Virgil. Love in a tragedy is not more eſſentially a fault, than it is in the Æneid. In ſhort, it is never blameable, but when it is brought in unſeaſonably, or treated inartificially.

The Greeks ſeldom ventur'd to bring this paſſion on the ſtage of Athens; firſt, becauſe their tragedies generally turning on ſubjects of terror, the minds of the ſpectators were bias'd as

it were in favour of that particular ſpecies; and, ſecondly, becauſe the women at that time led a much more retired life than ours do; and conſequently the language of love, not being as it is now the ſubject of every converſation, the poets had leſs inducement to treat a paſſion, which it is moſt difficult to paint on account of that very delicate management which it requires. Another reaſon, which I own weighs greatly with me, was, that they had no actreſſes, the women's parts being always play'd by men in maſks. Love from their mouths wou'd perhaps have appear'd ridiculous.

At London and Paris it is quite another thing: where it muſt be acknowledg'd the authors wou'd have very ill underſtood their own intereſts, and muſt have known little of their audience, to have made their Oldfields, Duclos, and Lecouvreurs talk of nothing but ambition and politics.

But the misfortune is, that love, with our heroes of the theatre, is ſeldom any thing more than gallantry: and with you it ſometimes degenerates into lewdneſs and debauchery. In our Alcibiades, a piece greatly follow'd but poorly written, and therefore at preſent in very little eſteem, we admir'd for a long time theſe bad verſes, which were repeated in a ſoft and perſuaſive tone by the Æſopus of the laſt age.

Fir'd with a real paſſion, when I ſaw
The lovely fair, and falling at her feet,
In her ſoft eyes, that ſparkled with deſire,
Or with a timid luſtre glanc'd upon me,
Beheld the mutual flame that in her breaſt
Reſponſive glow'd, what raptures fill'd my ſoul!
From thoſe bleſt minutes only have I learn'd
That man may taſte of perfect happineſs.

In

In your Venice Preſerv'd, old Renaud wants to debauch the wife of Jaffier; ſhe complains of it in terms rather indecent, and goes ſo far as to ſay he came to her, unbutton'd.

To render love worthy of the tragic ſcene, it ought to ariſe naturally from the buſineſs of the piece, and not be brought in by mere force, only to fill up a vacancy, as it generally does in your tragedies, and in ours, which are both of them too long: it ſhou'd be a paſſion intirely tragical, conſider'd as a weakneſs, and oppos'd by remorſe: it ſhou'd either lead to misfortunes or to crimes, to convince us how dangerous it is: or it ſhou'd be ſubdued by virtue, to ſhew us that it is not invincible. In all other caſes, it is no more than the love of an eclogue, or a comedy.

You, my lord, muſt decide whether I have fulfill'd any of theſe conditions: but I hope that, above all, your friends will be ſo candid, as not to judge of the genius and taſte of our nation by this diſcourſe, or by the tragedy which I have ſent you with it. I am, perhaps, one of thoſe who cultivate the belles lettres in France with the leaſt ſucceſs, and if the ſentiments which I have here ſubmitted to your judgment are diſapprov'd, I, and I only, deſerve to be cenſur'd for them.

DRAMATIS

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

JUNIUS BRUTUS,
VALERIUS PUBLICOLA. } Conſuls.
TITUS, Son of Brutus.
TULLIA, Daughter of Tarquin.
ALGINA, Confidant of Tullia.
ARUNS, Ambaſſador from Porſenna.
MESSALA, Friend of Titus.
PROCULUS, A military Tribune.
ALBINUS, Confidant of Aruns.

Senators. Lictors.

SCENE, ROME.

BRUTUS.

BRUTUS.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

BRUTUS. The SENATE.

The ſcene repreſents part of the houſe appointed for the conſuls on the Tarpeian mount: at a diſtance is ſeen the temple of the capitol. The ſenators are aſſembled between the temple and the houſe, before the altar of Mars: the two conſuls, Brutus and Valerius Publicola preſide: the ſenators ranged in a ſemi-circle; behind them the lictors with their faſces.

Bru. AT length, my noble friends, Rome's honour'd ſenate,
The ſcourge of tyrants, you who own no kings
But Numa's gods, your virtues, and your laws,
Our foe begins to know us: this proud Tuſcan,
The fierce Porſenna, Tarquin's boaſted friend,
Pleas'd to protect a tyrant like himſelf;

He who o'er Tyber's banks hath ſpread his hoſts,
And bore his head ſo loftily, now ſpeaks
In lowlier terms, reſpects the ſenate's pow'r,
And dreads the ſons of freedom and of Rome:
This day he comes, by his ambaſſador,
To treat of peace, and Aruns, ſent by him,
Demands an audience: he attends ev'n now
Your orders in the temple: you'll determine
Or to refuſe or to admit him to us.

Val. Whate'er his errand be, let him be ſent
Back to his king; imperial Rome ſhou'd never
Treat with her foes till ſhe has conquer'd them:
Thy valiant ſon, th' avenger of his country,
Has twice repuls'd Etruria's haughty monarch,
And much we owe to his victorious arm:
But this is not enough; Rome, ſtill beſieg'd,
Sees with a jealous eye the tyrant's friends:
Let Tarquin yield to our decrees; the laws
Doom'd him to exile; let him leave the realm,
And purge the ſtate of royal villany;
Perhaps we then may liſten to his pray'rs.
But this new embaſſy, it ſeems, has caught
Your eaſy faith: can you not ſee that Tarquin,
Who cou'd not conquer, thinks he may deceive you.
I never lov'd theſe king's ambaſſadors,
The worſt of foes beneath the maſk of friendſhip;
Who only bear an honourable title,
And come to cheat us with impunity;
Arm'd with ſtate-cunning, or elate with pride,
Commiſſion'd to inſult us, or betray.
Liſten not, Rome, to their deluding tongues;
Stranger to art, thy buſineſs is, to fight;
Conquer the foes that murmur at thy glory,
Puniſh the pride of kings, or fall thyſelf;
Such be thy treaties.

Bru. Rome already knows
How much I prize her ſafety and her freedom;
The ſame my ſpirit, and the ſame my purpoſe,
I differ in opinion from Valerius;
And muſt confeſs, this firſt great homage, paid
The citizens of Rome, to me is grateful.

I wou'd

I wou'd accuſtom the deſpotic pow'r
Of princes on an eaſy level firſt
To treat with our renowned common-weal,
'Till heav'n ſhall crown our arms with victory,
And make them ſubjects; then, Publicola,
As ſuch we'll uſe them: mean time, Aruns comes,
Doubtleſs to mark the ſtate of Rome, to count
Her treaſures, and obſerve her growing pow'r,
And therefore wou'd I have him be admitted;
Wou'd have him know us fully: a king's ſlave
Shall look on men; the novelty may pleaſe him:
Let him at leiſure caſt his eyes o'er Rome,
Let him behold her in your patriot breaſts,
You are her beſt defence; let him revere
The God who calls us hither; let him ſee
The ſenate, hear and tremble.

Val. I ſubmit;

[*The ſenators riſe and come forward to give their votes.*

The gen'ral voice is yours: Rome and her Brutus
Muſt be obey'd: for me, I diſapprove it:
Lictors, attend, and introduce him to us:
Never may Rome repent of this! On thee

[*To* Brutus.

Our eyes are fix'd; on Brutus, who firſt broke
Our chains; let freedom uſe a father's voice,
And ſpeak by thee.

SCENE II.

THE SENATE, ARUNS, ALBINUS, ATTENDANTS.

[Aruns *enters, preceded by two lictors, with* Albinus, *his friend; he paſſes by the conſuls and ſenate, ſalutes them, and ſits down on a ſeat prepar'd for him towards the front of the ſtage.*

Aru. With pleaſure I behold
This great aſſembly, Rome's illuſtrious ſenate,

And her ſage conſuls, fam'd for truth and juſtice,
Which ne'er till now ſuffer'd reproach or blame:
I know your deeds, and I admire your virtues;
Unlike the wild licentious multitude,
The vulgar croud, whom party rage or joins
Or diſunites, who love and hate by turns,
They know not why, taught in one changeful hour
To boaſt or beg, to rail or to obey:
Whoſe raſhneſs——

Bru. Stop, and learn with more reſpect
To treat the citizens of Rome; for know,
It is the ſenate's glory and her praiſe
To repreſent the brave and virtuous people
Whom thou haſt thus reviled: for ourſelves,
Let us not hear the voice of flattery;
It is the poiſon of Etrurian courts,
But ne'er has tainted yet a Roman ſenate.
On with thy meſſage.

Aru. Little doth the pride
Of Rome affect me; but I own I feel
For her misfortunes, and wou'd plead her cauſe
With filial love: you ſee the gath'ring ſtorm
Hangs o'er your heads, and threatens ſure deſtruction.
In vain hath Titus ſtrove to ſave his country;
With pity I behold that noble youth,
Whoſe ardent courage labours to ſupport
Expiring Rome, and make her fall more glorious:
His vict'ries coſt you dear; they thin your ramparts,
And weaken your ſmall force: no longer then
Refuſe a peace ſo needful to your ſafety.
The ſenate bears a father's love to Rome,
So does Porſenna to the hapleſs kings
Whom you oppreſs: but tell me, you who judge
Depending monarchs, you who thus determine
The rights of all mankind, was it not here,
Ev'n at theſe altars, at this capitol,
You call'd the gods to witneſs your allegiance,
And bound your faith to your acknowledg'd king,
To Tarquin? Say, what pow'r has broke the tie?
Who ſnatch'd the diadem from Tarquin's head?
Who can acquit you of your oaths?

Bru.

Bru. Himſelf:
Talk not of ties diſſolv'd by guilt, of gods
Whom he renounc'd, or rights which he has loſt;
We paid him homage, bound ourſelves by oath,
Oaths of obedience, not of ſlavery:
But ſince thou bid'ſt us call to our remembrance,
The ſenate making vows for Tarquin's health,
And kneeling at his feet, remember thou,
That on this ſacred ſpot, this altar here,
Before the ſame atteſting gods, that Tarquin
Swore to be juſt; ſuch was the mutual bond
Of prince and people, and he gave us back
The oath we made, when he forgot his own:
Since to Rome's laws no more he pays obedience,
Rome is no longer ſubject to his pow'r,
And Tarquin is the rebel, not his people.

Aru. But, grant it true, that pow'r unlimited,
And abſolute dominion, had miſled
Th' unhappy monarch from the paths of duty,
Is there a man from human error free?
Is there a king without ſome human weakneſs?
Or if there were, have you a right to puniſh,
You, who were born his ſubjects; you whoſe duty
Is to obey? The ſon doth never arm
Againſt the ſire, but with averted eyes
Laments his errors, and reveres him ſtill:
And not leſs ſacred are the rights of kings;
They are our fathers, and the gods alone
Their judges: if in anger heav'n ſometimes
Doth ſend them down, why wou'd you therefore call
For heavier chains, and judgments more ſevere?
Why violate the laws you wou'd defend,
And only change your empire to deſtroy it?
Taught by misfortunes, beſt of monitors,
Tarquin henceforth, more worthy of his throne,
Will be more wiſe and juſt; the legal bonds
Of king and people now may be confirm'd
By happieſt union; public liberty
Shall flouriſh then beneath the awful ſhade
Of regal pow'r.

Bru. Aruns, 'tis now too late:
Each nation has its laws, by nature giv'n,
Or chang'd by choice: Etruria, born to ſerve,
Hath ever been the ſlave of kings or prieſts;
Loves to obey, and, happy in her chains,
Wou'd bind them on the necks of all mankind.
Greece boaſts her freedom; ſoft Ionia bends
Beneath a ſhameful bondage; Rome had once
Her kings, but they were never abſolute:
Her firſt great citizen was Romulus,
With him his people ſhar'd the weight of empire;
Numa was govern'd by the laws he made;
Rome fell at laſt indeed beneath herſelf,
When from Etruria ſhe receiv'd her kings,
Or from Porſenna; tyranny and vice
From your corrupted courts flow'd in upon us.
Forgive us, gods, the crime of ſparing Tarquin
So many years! at length his murth'rous hands,
Dy'd with our blood, have broke the ſhameful chain
Of our long ſlav'ry, and the Roman people
Have through misfortune found the road to virtue:
Tarquin reſtores the rights by Tarquin loſt,
And by his crimes has fix'd the public ſafety:
We've taught the Tuſcans how to ſhake off tyrants,
And hope they'll profit by the fair example.

[*The conſuls deſcend towards the altar, and the ſenate riſes.*]

O Mars, thou god of battles, and of Rome!
Thou who doſt guard theſe ſacred walls, and fight
For thy own people, on thy altar here
Deign to accept our ſolemn oaths, for me
And for the ſenate, for thy worthy ſons:
If in Rome's boſom there be found a traitor,
Who weeps for baniſh'd kings, and ſeeks once more
To be a ſlave, in torments ſhall he die;
His guilty aſhes, ſcatter'd to the winds,
Shall leave behind a more deteſted name,
Ev'n than thoſe tyrant kings which Rome abhors.

Aru. And on this altar, which you thus profane,

[*Stepping towards the altar.*

I call that god to witneſs, in the name

Of

Of him whom you oppreſs, the injur'd Tarquin,
And great Porſenna, his avenger, here
I ſwear eternal war with you, O Romans!
And your poſterity—

[*The ſenators are going off towards the capitol.*

A moment ſtop
Ere you depart, O ſenators! and hear
What I have more to offer: Tarquin's daughter,
Muſt ſhe too fall a ſacrifice to Rome?
With ignominious fetters will ye bind
Her royal hands, to triumph o'er her father,
Whoſe treaſures you detain? Ungen'rous victors!
As if the right of conqueſt gave them to you:
Where are his riches? was it for the ſpoil
You robb'd him of his throne? let Brutus ſpeak
And own the plunder.

Bru. Little do'ſt thou know
Of Rome, her manners, and her noble nature;
But learn, miſtaken man, her great protectors,
The friends of truth and juſtice, are grown old
In honeſt poverty; above the pride
Of wealth, which they diſdain; it is their boaſt
To conquer kings, who love ſuch tinſel greatneſs.
Take back your gold, it is beneath our notice;
And for the hateful tyrant's hapleſs daughter,
Though I abhor the wretched race, yet know
The ſenate has conſign'd her to my care:
She hath not taſted here the baneful cup
Of flatt'ry, that ſweet poiſon of a court,
Or view'd the pomp and dang'rous luxury
Of Tarquin's palace: little did her youth
Profit by them; but all that to her age
And ſex was due, all her misfortunes claim'd,
She hath receiv'd: let her return this day
To Tarquin; Brutus yields her back with joy:
Nought ſhou'd the tyrant have within theſe walls
But Rome's fix'd hatred, and the wrath of heav'n:
You have a day to carry off your treaſures,
That muſt ſuffice: mean time, the ſacred rights
Of hoſpitality await thee here;
Beneath my roof thou may'ſt remain in ſafety:

The ſenate thus by me decrees: bear thou
Our anſwer to Porſenna, and then tell
Proud Tarquin, you have ſeen a Roman ſenate.
[*Turning to the ſenators.*
Let us, my friends, adorn the capitol
With laurel wreaths, that round the brows of Titus
Have ſpread their noble ſhade; the arrows too,
And bloody enſigns, his victorious hand
Hath wreſted from the Tuſcans: ever thus,
From age to age, may the ſucceſsful race
Of Brutus ſtill defend their much lov'd country:
Thus, O ye gods, may you protect us ever;
Guide the ſon's arm, and bleſs the father's councils!

SCENE III.

ARUNS, ALBINUS.

[*Suppoſ'd to have retir'd from the hall of audience into an apartment of* Brutus's *houſe.*]

Aru. Didſt thou obſerve the fierce unbending ſpirit
Of this proud ſenate, which believes itſelf
Invincible? and ſo perhaps it might be,
Were Rome at leiſure to confirm her ſons
In valour and in wiſdom: liberty,
That liberty, my friend, which all adore,
And I admire, tho' I wou'd wreſt it from them,
Inſpires the heart of man with nobler courage
Than nature gives, and warmth almoſt divine.
Beneath the Tarquin's yoke, a ſlaviſh court
Enfeebled their corrupted hearts, and ſpoil'd
Their active valour; whilſt their tyrant kings,
Buſy'd in conqu'ring their own ſubjects, left
Our happier Tuſcans in the arms of peace;
But if the ſenate ſhou'd awake their virtues,
If Rome is free, Italia ſoon muſt fall:
Theſe lions, whom their keepers made ſo gentle,
Will find their ſtrength again, and ruſh upon us;
Let us then ſtop this rapid ſtream of woes,

Ev'n

Ev'n at its ſource, and free a ſinking world
From ſlav'ry; let us bind theſe haughty Romans
Ev'n with the chains which they wou'd throw on us,
And all mankind.—But will Meſſala come,
May I expect him here? and will he dare—
Alb. My lord, he will attend you; ev'ry minute
We look for him; and Titus is our friend.
Aru. Have you conferr'd; may I depend on him?
Alb. Meſſala, if I err not, means to change
His own eſtate, rather than that of Rome;
As firm and fearleſs as if honour guided,
And patriot love inſpir'd him; ever ſecret,
And maſter of himſelf; no paſſions move,
No rage diſturbs him; in his heighth of zeal
Calm and unruffled.
Aru. Such he ſeem'd to me
When firſt I ſaw him at the court of Tarquin;
His letters ſince—but, ſee, he comes.

SCENE IV.

ARUNS, MESSALA, ALBINUS.

Aru. Meſſala,
Thou gen'rous friend of an unhappy maſter,
Will neither Tarquin's nor Porſenna's gold
Shake the firm faith of theſe rough ſenators?
Will neither fear, nor hope, nor pleaſure bend
Their ſtubborn hearts? Theſe fierce patrician chiefs,
That judge mankind, are they without or vice
Or paſſion? is there aught that's mortal in them?
Meſ. Their boaſts are mighty, but their falſe pretence
To juſtice, and the fierce auſterity
Of their proud hearts, are nothing but the thirſt
Of empire; their pride treads on diadems;
Yet whilſt they break one chain, they forge another.
Theſe great avengers of our liberty,
Arm'd to defend it, are its worſt oppreſſors:
Beneath the name of patrons they aſſume

The part of monarchs; Rome but chang'd her fetters,
And for one king hath found a hundred tyrants.

Aru. Is there amongſt your citizens a man
Honeſt enough to hate ſuch ſhameful bondage?

Meſ. Few, very few, yet feel their miſeries:
Their ſpirits, ſtill elate with this new change,
Are mad with joy: the meaneſt wretch among them,
Becauſe he help'd to pull down monarchy,
Aſſumes its pride, and thinks himſelf a king:
But I've already told you I have friends,
Who with reluctance bend to this new yoke;
Who look with ſcorn on a deluded people,
And ſtem the torrent with unſhaken firmneſs;
Good men and true, whoſe hands and hearts were made
To change the ſtate of kingdoms, or deſtroy them.

Aru. What may I hope from theſe brave Romans? ſay,
Will they ſerve Tarquin?

Meſ. They'll do any thing;
Their lives are thine; but think not, like blind vaſſals,
They will obey a baſe ungrateful maſter:
They boaſt no wild enthuſiaſtic zeal,
To fall the victims of deſpotic pow'r,
Or madly ruſh on death to ſave a tyrant,
Who will not know them. Tarquin promiſes
Moſt nobly, but when he ſhall be their maſter,
Perhaps he then may fear, perhaps forget them.
I know the great too well: in their misfortunes
No friends ſo warm; but in proſperity,
Ungrateful oft, they change to bitt'reſt foes:
We are the ſervile tools of their ambition;
When uſeleſs, thrown aſide with proud diſdain,
Or broke without remorſe when we grow dang'rous.
Our friends expect conditions ſhall be made;
On certain terms you may depend upon them:
They only aſk a brave and worthy leader
To pleaſe their fickle taſte; a man well known,
And well reſpected; one who may have pow'r
To force the king to keep his plighted faith
If we ſucceed; and if we fail, endued
With manly courage to avenge our cauſe.

Aru.

Aru. You wrote me word the haughty Titus—
Meſ. Titus
Is Rome's ſupport, the ſon of Brutus; yet—
Aru. How does he brook the ſenate's baſe reward
For all his ſervices? he ſav'd the city,
And merited the conſulſhip, which they,
I find, refuſe him.
Meſ. And he murmurs at it.
I know his proud and fiery ſoul is full
Of the baſe inj'ry: for his noble deeds,
Nought has he gain'd but a vain empty triumph;
A fleeting ſhadow of unreal bliſs:
I am no ſtranger to his throbbing heart,
And ſtrength of paſſion; in the paths of glory
So lately enter'd, 'twere an eaſy taſk
To turn his ſteps aſide; for fiery youth
Is eaſily betray'd: and yet what bars
To our deſign! a conſul, and a father;
His hate of kings; Rome pleading for her ſafety;
The dread of ſhame, and all his triumphs paſt.
But I have ſtole into his heart, and know
The ſecret poiſon that enflames his ſoul:
He ſighs for Tullia.
Aru. Ha! for Tullia?
Meſ. Yes:
Scarce cou'd I draw the ſecret from his breaſt;
He bluſh'd himſelf at the diſcovery,
Aſham'd to own his love; for midſt the tumult
Of jarring paſſions, ſtill his zeal prevails
For liberty.
Aru. Thus on a ſingle heart,
And its unequal movements, muſt depend,
Spite of myſelf, the fate of Rome: but hence,
Albinus, and prepare for Tarquin's tent.
[*Turning to* Meſſala.
We'll to the princeſs: I have gain'd ſome knowledge,
By long experience, of the human heart:
I'll try to read her ſoul; perhaps her hands
May weave a net to catch this Roman ſenate.

END of the FIRST ACT.

ACT

ACT II. SCENE I.

The ſcene repreſents an apartment in the palace of the conſuls.

TITUS, MESSALA.

Meſ. No: 'tis unkind; it hurts my tender friendſhip:
He who but half unveils his ſecrets, tells
Too little or too much: doſt thou ſuſpect me?
Tit. Do not reproach me; my whole heart is thine.
Meſ Thou who ſo lately didſt with me deteſt
The rig'rous ſenate, and pour forth thy plaints
In anguiſh; thou who on this faithful boſom
Didſt ſhed ſo many tears, coud'ſt thou conceal
Griefs far more bitter, the keen pangs of love?
How cou'd ambition quench the riſing flame,
And blot out every tender ſentiment?
Doſt thou deteſt the hateful ſenate more
Than thou lov'ſt Tullia?
Tit. O! I love with tranſport,
And hate with fury; ever in extreme;
It is the native weakneſs of my ſoul,
Which much I ſtrive to conquer, but in vain.
Meſ. But why thus raſhly tear thy bleeding wounds?
Why weep the inj'ries, yet diſguiſe thy love?
Tit. Spite of thoſe inj'ries, ſpite of all my wrongs,
Have I not ſhed my blood for this proud ſenate?
Thou know'ſt I have, and didſt partake my glory;
With joy I told thee of my fair ſucceſs;
It ſhew'd, methought, a nobleneſs of ſoul
To fight for the ungrateful, and I felt
The pride of conſcious virtue: the misfortunes

We

We have o'ercome with pleaſure we impart,
But few are anxious to reveal their ſhame.
Meſ. Where is the ſhame, the folly, or diſgrace?
And what ſhou'd Titus bluſh at?
Tit. At myſelf:
At my fond fooliſh paſſion, that o'erpow'rs
My duty.
Meſ. Are ambition then, and love,
Paſſions unworthy of a noble mind?
Tit. Ambition, love, reſentment, all poſſeſs
The ſoul of Titus, and by turns enflame it:
Theſe conſul kings deſpiſe my youth; deny me
My valour's due reward, the price of blood
Shed in their cauſe: then, midſt my ſorrows, ſeize
All I hold dear, and ſnatch my Tullia from me.
Alas! I had no hope, and yet my heart
Grows jealous now: the fire, long pent within,
Burſts forth with inextinguiſhable rage.
I thought it had been o'er; ſhe parted from me,
And I had almoſt gain'd the victory
O'er my rebellious paſſion: but my race
Of glory now is run, and heav'n has fix'd
Its period here: Gods! that the ſon of Brutus,
The foe of kings, ſhou'd ever be the ſlave
Of Tarquin's race! nay, the ungrateful fair
Scorns to accept my conquer'd heart: I'm ſlighted;
Diſdain'd on ev'ry ſide, and ſhame o'erwhelms me.
Meſ. May I with freedom ſpeak to thee?
Tit. Thou may'ſt:
Thou know'ſt I ever have rever'd thy prudence;
Speak therefore, tell me all my faults, Meſſala.
Meſ. No: I approve thy love, and thy reſentment:
Shall Titus authoriſe this tyrant ſenate,
Theſe ſons of arrogance; if thou muſt bluſh,
Bluſh for thy patience, Titus, not thy love.
Are theſe the poor rewards of all thy valour,
Thy conſtancy, and truth? a hopeleſs lover,
A weak and pow'rleſs citizen of Rome,
A poor ſtate-victim, by the ſenate brav'd,
And ſcorn'd by Tullia: ſure a heart like thine
Might find the means to be reveng'd on both.

Tit.

Tit. Why wilt thou flatter my deſpairing ſoul?
Think'ſt thou I ever cou'd ſubdue her hate,
Or ſhake her virtue? 'tis impoſſible:
Thou ſee'ſt the fatal barriers to our love,
Which duty and our fathers place between us:
But muſt ſhe go?

Meſ. This day, my lord.

Tit. Indeed!
But I will not complain: for heav'n is juſt
To her deſervings; ſhe was born to reign.

Meſ. Heav'n had perhaps reſerv'd a fairer empire
For beauteous Tullia, but for this proud ſenate,
But for this cruel war, nay but for Titus:
Forgive me, ſir, you know th' inheritance
She might have claim'd; her brother dead, the throne
Of Rome had been her portion—but I've gone
Too far—and yet, if with my life, O Titus,
I cou'd have ſerv'd thee, if my blood——

Tit. No more:
My duty calls, and that ſhall be obey'd:
Man may be free, if he reſolves to be ſo:
I own, the dang'rous paſſion for a time
O'erpow'r'd my reaſon; but a ſoldier's heart
Braves ev'ry danger: love owes all his pow'r
To our own weakneſs.

Meſ. The ambaſſador
From Tuſcany is here: this honour, ſir——

Tit. O fatal honour! what wou'd he with me?
He comes to ſnatch my Tullia from my ſight;
Comes to complete the meaſure of my woes.

SCENE II.

TITUS, ARUNS.

Aru. After my long and fruitleſs toils to ſerve
The ſtate of Rome, and her ungrateful ſenate,
Permit me here to pay the homage due
To gen'rous courage, and tranſcendent virtue;

Permit

Permit me to admire the gallant hero
Who ſav'd his country on the brink of ruin:
Alas! thou haſt deſerv'd a fairer meed,
A cauſe more noble, and another foe;
Thy valour merited a better fate:
Kings wou'd rejoice, and ſuch I know there are,
To truſt their empire with an arm like thine,
Who wou'd not dread the virtues they admire,
Like jealous Rome and her proud ſenate: O!
I cannot bear to ſee the noble Titus
Serving theſe haughty tyrants; who, the more
You have oblig'd them, hate you more: to them
Your merit's a reproach; mean vulgar ſouls,
Born to obey, they lift th' oppreſſive hand
Againſt their great deliv'rer, and uſurp
Their ſovereign's rights; from thee they ſhou'd receive
Thoſe orders which they give.

Tit. I thank you, Sir,
For all your cares, your kind regard for Titus,
And gueſs the cauſe: your ſubtle policy
Wou'd wind me to your ſecret purpoſes,
And arm my rage againſt the common-weal:
But think not to impoſe thus on my frankneſs;
My heart is open, and abhors deſign:
The ſenate have miſus'd me, and I hate 'em;
I ought to hate 'em, but I'll ſerve 'em ſtill:
When Rome engages in the common cauſe,
No private quarrels taint the patriot breaſt;
Superior then to party ſtrife, we ruſh
United on againſt the gen'ral foe:
Such are my thoughts, and ſuch they ever will be;
Thou know'ſt me now: or call it virtue in me,
Or call it partial fondneſs, what you pleaſe,
But, born a Roman, I will die for Rome,
And love this hard, unjuſt, ſuſpicious ſenate,
More than the pomp and ſplendor of a court
Beneath a maſter, for I am the ſon
Of Brutus, and have grav'd upon my heart
The love of freedom, and the hate of kings.

Aru. But does not Titus ſooth his flatter'd heart
With fancy'd bliſs, and viſionary charms?

I too,

I too, my lord, though born within the ſway
Of regal pow'r, am fond of liberty;
You languiſh for her, yet enjoy her not.
Is there on earth, with all your boaſted freedom,
Aught more deſpotic than a common-weal?
Your laws are tyrants; and their barb'rous rigour,
Deaf to the voice of merit, to applauſe,
To family, and fame, throws down diſtinction;
The ſenate grind you, and the people ſcorn;
You muſt affright 'em, or they will enſlave you:
A citizen of Rome is ever jealous
Or inſolent; he is your equal ſtill,
Or ſtill your foe, becauſe inferior to you:
He cannot bear the luſtre of high fortune;
Looks with an eye ſevere on ev'ry action;
In all the ſervice you have done him, ſees
Nought but the inj'ry you have pow'r to do;
And for the blood which you have ſhed for him,
You'll be repaid at laſt with——baniſhment.
A court, I own's a dang'rous element,
And has its ſtorms, but not ſo frequent; ſmooth
Its current glides, its ſurface more ſerene:
That boaſted native of another ſoil,
Fair liberty, here ſheds her ſweeteſt flow'rs:
A king can love, can recompenſe your ſervice,
And mingles happineſs with glory; there
Cheriſh'd beneath the ſhade of royal favor,
Long may'ſt thou flouriſh, only ſerve a maſter,
And be thyſelf the lord of all beſide:
The vulgar, ever to their ſov'reign's will
Obedient, ſtill reſpect and honour thoſe
Whom he protects, nay love his very faults:
We never tremble at a haughty ſenate,
Or her harſh laws: O! wou'd that, born as thou art,
To ſhine with equal luſtre in a court
Or in a camp, thou woud'ſt but taſte the charms
Of Tarquin's goodneſs! for he lov'd thee, Titus,
And wou'd have ſhar'd his fortunes with thee; then
Had the proud ſenate, proſtrate at thy feet———

Tit. I've ſeen the court of Tarquin, and deſpiſe it:
I know I might have cring'd for his protection,

Been

Been his firſt ſlave, and tyranniz'd beneath him;
But, thanks to heav'n, I am not fall'n ſo low:
I wou'd be great, but not by meanneſs riſe
To grandeur: no, it never was my fate
To ſerve: I'll conquer kings, do thou obey them.
Aru. I muſt approve thy conſtancy; but think,
My lord, how Tarquin, in thy infant years,
Guided thy tender youth: he oft remembers
The pleaſing office, and but yeſterday,
Lamenting his loſt ſon, and ſad misfortunes,
'Titus, ſaid he, was once my beſt ſupport,
'He lov'd us all, and he alone deſerv'd
'My kingdom and my daughter.'
Tit. Ha! his daughter!
Ye gods! my Tullia! O unhappy vows!
Aru. Ev'n now I carry her to Tarquin; him
Whom thou haſt thus deſerted, far from thee,
And from her country, ſoon muſt Tullia go;
Liguria's king accepts of her in marriage:
Mean-time thou, Titus, muſt obey the ſenate,
Oppreſs her father, and deſtroy his kingdom:
And may theſe vaulted roofs, theſe tow'rs in flame,
And this proud capitol in aſhes laid,
Like fun'ral torches, ſhine before your people,
To light the Roman ſenate to its grave,
Or ſerve to grace our happy Tullia's nuptials!

SCENE III.

TITUS, MESSALA.

Tit. Meſſala, in what anguiſh hath he left me!
Wou'd Tarquin then have giv'n her to my arms!
O cruel fate! and might I thus—O no,
Deceitful miniſter! thou cam'ſt to ſearch
My fooliſh heart; alas! he ſaw too well,
Read in my eyes the dear deſtructive paſſion,

He

He knows my weakneſs, and returns to Tarquin
To ſmile at Titus, and inſult his love:
And might I then have wedded her, poſſeſs'd
That lovely maid, and ſpent a life of bliſs
Within her arms, had heav'n allotted me
So fair a fate! O I am doubly wretched.

Meſ. Thou might'ſt be happy; Aruns wou'd aſſiſt thee,
Truſt me, he wou'd, and ſecond thy warm wiſhes.

Tit. No: I muſt bid adieu to my fond hopes;
Rome calls me to the capitol; the people,
Who rais'd triumphal arches to my glory,
And love me for my labours paſt, expect me,
To take with them th' inviolable oath,
The ſolemn pledge of ſacred liberty.

Meſ. Go then, and ſerve your tyrants.

Tit. I will ſerve them;
It is my duty, and I muſt fulfil it.

Meſ. And yet you ſigh.

Tit. 'Tis a hard victory.

Meſ. And bought too dearly.

Tit. Therefore 'tis more glorious.
Meſſala, do not leave me in affliction. [*Exit* Titus.

Meſ. I'll follow him, to ſharpen his reſentment,
And ſtrike th' envenom'd dagger to his heart.

SCENE IV.

BRUTUS, MESSALA.

Bru. Meſſala, ſtop; I'd ſpeak with you.

Meſ. With me?

Bru. With you. A deadly poiſon late hath ſpread
Its ſecret venom o'er my houſe: my ſon,
Tiberius, is with jealous rage enflam'd
Againſt his brother; it appears too plain;
Whilſt Titus burns with moſt unjuſt reſentment
Againſt the ſenate: the ambaſſador,

That

That wily Tuſcan, has obſerv'd their weakneſs,
And doubtleſs profits by it: he has talk'd
To both: I dread the tongues of ſubtil ſtateſmen,
Grown old in the chican'ry of a court:
To-morrow he returns: a day's too much
To give a traitor, and oft'times is fatal:
Go thou, Meſſala, tell him he muſt hence
This day: I'll have it ſo.

Meſ. 'Tis prudent, Sir,
And I obey you.

Bru. But this is not all:
My ſon, the noble Titus, loves thee well;
I know the pow'r that ſacred friendſhip hath
O'er minds like his; a ſtranger to diſtruſt
Or diffidence, he yields his artleſs ſoul
To thy experience; and the more his heart
Relies on thee, the more may I expect,
That, able as thou art to guide his ſteps,
Thou wilt not turn them from the paths of virtue,
Or take advantage of his eaſy youth
To taint his guiltleſs heart with fond ambition.

Meſ. That was ev'n now the ſubject of our converſe;
He ſtrives to imitate his godlike ſire;
Rome's ſafety is the object of his care:
Blindly he loves his country, and his father.

Bru. And ſo he ought; but above all, the laws;
To them he ſhou'd be ſtill a faithful ſlave;
Who breaks the laws, can never love his country.

Meſ. We know his patriot zeal, and both have ſeen it.

Bru. He did his duty.

Meſ. Rome had done her's too,
If ſhe had honour'd more ſo good a ſon.

Bru. Meſſala, no: it ſuited not his age
To take the conſulſhip; he had not ev'n
The voice of Brutus: truſt me, the ſucceſs
Of his ambition wou'd have ſoon corrupted
His noble mind, and the rewards of virtue
Had then become hereditary: ſoon
Shou'd we have ſeen the baſe unworthy ſon
Of a brave father claim ſuperior rank,

Unmerited

Unmerited, in ſloth and luxury,
As our laſt Tarquin but too plainly prov'd.
How very ſeldom they deſerve a crown
Who're born to wear it! O! preſerve us, heav'n,
From ſuch deſtructive vile abuſe of pow'r,
The nurſe of folly, and the grave of virtue!
If thou indeed doſt love my ſon, (and much
I hope thou doſt) ſhew him a fairer path
To glory; root out from his heart the pride
Of falſe ambition: he who ſerves the ſtate
Is amply recompens'd: the ſon of Brutus
Shou'd ſhine a bright example to the world
Of ev'ry virtue: he is Rome's ſupport,
As ſuch I look upon him; and the more
He has already done to ſerve his country,
The more I ſhall require of him hereafter.
Know then by what I wiſh the love I bear him,
Temper the heat of youth; to flatter Titus
Were death to him, and injury to Rome.
Meſ. My lord, I am content to follow Titus,
To imitate his valour, not inſtruct him:
I have but little influence o'er your ſon;
But, if he deigns to liſten to my counſels,
Rome ſoon will ſee how much he loves her glory.
Bru. Go then, be careful not to ſooth his errors;
For I hate tyrants much, but flatt'rers more.
[*Exit* Brutus.

SCENE V.

MESSALA alone.

There's not a tyrant more deteſtable,
More cruel than thy own relentleſs ſoul;
But I ſhall tread perhaps beneath my feet
The pride of all thy falſe inſulting virtue:
Yes, thou Coloſſus, rais'd thus high above us

By

By a vile croud, the thunder is prepar'd,
Soon ſhall it fall, and cruſh thee into ruin.

ACT III. SCENE I.

ARUNS, ALBINUS, MESSALA.

ARUNS. [*A letter in his hand.*]

AT length, my friend, a dawn of fair ſucceſs
Breaks in upon us; thou haſt ſerv'd me nobly,
And all is well: this letter, my Albinus,
Decides the fate of Tarquin, and of Rome.
But, tell me, have you fix'd th' important hour?
Have you watch'd cloſely the Quirinal gate?
If our conſpirators to night ſhould fail
To yield the ramparts up, will your aſſault
Be ready? Is the king well ſatisfy'd,
Think'ſt thou, Albinus, we ſhall bring him back
To Rome ſubjected, or to Rome in blood?

Alb. My lord, by midnight all will be prepar'd;
Tarquin already reaps the promis'd harveſt;
From you, once more, receives the diadem,
And owns himſelf indebted more to Aruns
Than to Porſenna.

Aru. Or the envious gods,
Foes to our hapleſs ſov'reign, muſt deſtroy
Our fair deſign, well worthy of their aid;
Or by to-morrow's dawn rebellious Rome
Shall own a maſter; Rome perhaps in aſhes,
Or bathing in her blood. But better is it
A king ſhou'd rule o'er an unhappy people,
Who are obedient, than in plenty's lap,
O'er a proud nation, who are ſtill perverſe
And obſtinate, becauſe they are too happy.

Albinus,

Albinus, I attend the princeſs here
In ſecret——Stay, Meſſala.

SCENE II.

ARUNS, MESSALA.

Aru. Touching Titus,
What haſt thou done? coud'ſt thou prevail on him
To ſerve the cauſe of Tarquin? coud'ſt thou bind
His haughty ſoul?

Meſ. No: I preſum'd too far;
He is inflexible: he loves his country,
And has too much of Brutus in him; murmurs
Againſt the ſenate, but ſtill dotes on Tullia:
Pride and ambition, love and jealouſy,
Open'd, I thought, a paſſage to his ſoul,
And gave my arts ſome promiſe of ſucceſs;
But, ſtrange infatuation! liberty
Prevail'd o'er all: his love is deſperate,
Yet Rome is ſtronger ev'n than love: in vain
I ſtrove, by ſlow degrees, t'efface the horror
Which Rome had taught his fooliſh heart to feel
Ev'n at the name of king; in vain oppos'd
His rooted prejudice; the very mention
Of Tarquin fir'd his ſoul; he would not hear me,
But broke off the diſcourſe: I muſt have gone
Too far had I perſiſted.

Aru. Then, Meſſala,
There are no hopes of him.

Meſ. Much leſs reluctant
I found his brother; one of Brutus' ſons,
At leaſt, is ours.

Aru. Already haſt thou gain'd
Tiberius? by what lucky art, Meſſala——

Meſ. His own ambition did it all: long time,
With jealous eye, hath he beheld the honours,
Heap'd on his brother, that eclipſe his own;

The

The wreath of laurel, and the pomp of triumph,
The weaving enſigns, with the people's love,
And Brutus' fondneſs, laviſh'd all on Titus,
Like deepeſt injuries, ſunk into his ſoul,
And help'd to fill the poiſon'd cup of envy;
Whilſt Titus, void of malice or revenge,
Too much ſuperior to be jealous of him,
Stretch'd forth his hand from his triumphal car,
As if he wiſh'd to give his brother part
Of all his glories: I embrac'd, with joy,
The lucky minute; pointed out the paths
Of glory; promis'd, in the name of Tarquin,
All the fair honours Rome cou'd give, the throne
Alone excepted; I perceiv'd him ſtagger,
And ſaw him bend, by ſlow degrees, before me:
He's yours, my lord, and longs to ſpeak with you.

Aru. Will he deliver the Quirinal gate,
Meſſala?

Meſ. Titus is commander there,
And he alone can give it us: already
His virtues have been fatal to our purpoſe;
He is the guardian deity of Rome:
Th' attack is dang'rous: without his ſupport
Succeſs were doubtful, with it all is certain.

Aru. If he ſolicited the conſulſhip,
Think'ſt thou he wou'd refuſe the ſov'reign pow'r,
The ſure reverſion of a throne with Tullia?

Meſ. 'Twere an affront to his exalted virtue
To offer him a throne.

Aru. And Tullia with it?

Meſ. O he adores her; and ev'n loves her more,
Becauſe he ſtrives to hate; deteſts the father,
And rages for the daughter; dreads to ſpeak,
Yet mourns in ſilence; ſeeks her ev'ry where,
Yet ſhuns her preſence, and drinks up his tears
In ſecret anguiſh: all the rage of love
Poſſeſſes him: ſometimes in ſtorms like theſe
A lucky moment turns the wav'ring mind.
Titus, I know, is turbulent and bold;
And, if we gain him, may, perhaps, go further
Ev'n than we wiſh: who knows but fierce ambition

May

May yet rekindle by the torch of love!
His heart wou'd glow with pleaſure, to behold
The trembling ſenate proſtrate at his feet.
Yet, let me not deceive you with the hopes,
That Titus ever will be ours; once more,
However, I ſhall try his ſtubborn virtue.

Aru. If ſtill he loves, I ſhall depend on him:
One look of Tullia's, one ſweet word from her,
Will ſoften his reluctant heart much more,
Than all the arts of Aruns or Meſſala:
For, O, believe me, we muſt hope for nought
From men, but thro' their weakneſs and their follies:
Titus and Tullia muſt promote our cauſe;
The one's ambition, and the other's love:
Theſe, theſe, my friend, are the conſpirators
That beſt will ſerve the king: from them I hope
Much more than from myſelf. [*Exit* Meſſala.

SCENE III.

TULLIA, ARUNS, ALGINA.

Aru. This letter, Madam,
With orders to deliver it to your hand,
I have receiv'd from Tarquin.

Tul. Gracious heav'n!
Preſerve my father, and reverſe his fate! [*She reads.*
'The throne of Rome may from its aſhes riſe,
'And he who was the conqu'ror of his king
'Be his reſtorer: Titus is a hero,
'He muſt defend that ſceptre which I wiſh
'To ſhare with him. Remember, O my Tullia,
'That Tarquin gave thee life; remember too,
'My fate depends on thee; thou may'ſt refuſe
'Liguria's king: if Titus be thy choice,
'He's mine; receive him for thy huſband.' Ha!
Read I aright? Titus! impoſſible!

Could

Could Tarquin, could my father, ſtill unmov'd
In all his ſorrows, thus at laſt relent?
How could he know, or whence——
Alas, my lord, [*Turning to* Meſſala.
'Tis but to ſearch the ſecrets of my heart
You try me thus: pity a wretched princeſs,
Nor ſpread your ſnares for helpleſs youth like mine.

Aru. Madam, I only mean t'obey your father,
And ſerve his honour'd daughter; for your ſecrets,
In me it were preſumption to remove
The ſacred veil, which you have drawn before them;
My duty only bids me ſay, that heav'n
By you determines to reſtore our empire.

Tul. And is it poſſible, that Tullia thus
Should be the friend of Tarquin, and the wife
Of Titus?

Aru. Doubt it not: that noble hero
Already burns to ſerve the royal race:
His gen'rous heart abhors the ſavage fierceneſs
Of this new common-weal; his pride was hurt
By their refuſal of his juſt demand:
The work's half done, and thou muſt finiſh it.
I have not look'd into his heart; but ſure,
If he knows Tullia well, he muſt adore her:
Who cou'd behold, unmov'd, a diadem
By thee preſented, and with thee adorn'd?
Speak to him then, for thou alone haſt pow'r
To triumph o'er this enemy of kings:
No longer let the ſenate boaſt of Titus,
Their beſt ſupport, the guardian god of Rome;
But be it Tullia's glory to poſſeſs
The great defender of her father's cauſe,
And cruſh his foes to ruin.

SCENE IV.

TULLIA, ALGINA.

Tul. Gracious heav'n!
How much I owe to thy propitious goodneſs!
My tears have mov'd thee: all is chang'd; and now
Thy juſtice, ſmiling on my paſſion, gives
New ſtrength and freedom to the glorious flame.
Fly, my Algina, bring him hither: gods!
Does he avoid me ſtill, or knows he not
His happineſs? But ſtay, perhaps my hopes
Are but deluſions all: does Titus hate
The ſenate thus? alas! and muſt I owe
That to reſentment which is due to love?
Alg. I know the ſenate have offended him;
That he's ambitious; that he burns for Tullia.
Tul. Then he'll do all to ſerve me: fly, Algina,
Away, begone. [*Exit* Algina.
And yet this ſudden change
Alarms me: O! what anguiſh racks my heart!
Now, love, do thou aſſiſt and guide my virtue!
My fame, my duty, reaſon, all command it.
And ſhall my father owe his crown to me?
Shall Tullia be the chain to bind their friendſhip;
And all Rome's happineſs depend on mine?
O, when ſhall I impart to thee, my Titus,
The wond'rous change we little thought to ſee,
When ſhall I hear thy vows, and give thee mine,
Without a pain, a ſorrow, or a fear?
My woes are paſt; now, Rome, I can forgive thee;
If Titus leaves thee, Rome, thou art a ſlave:
If he is mine, proud ſenate, thou'rt no more:
He loves me; tremble therefore, and obey.

SCENE

SCENE V.

TITUS, TULLIA.

Tit. May I believe it? wilt thou deign once more
To look on this abhorred Roman, long
The object of thy hatred, and thy foe?
Tul. The face of things, my lord, is ſtrangely alter'd:
Fate now permits me——but firſt tell me, Titus,
Has Tullia ſtill an int'reſt in thy heart?
Tit. Alas! thou can'ſt not doubt thy fatal pow'r;
Thou know'ſt my love, my guilt, and my deſpair;
And hold'ſt a cruel empire o'er a life
Which I deteſt; exhauſt your rage upon me;
My fate is in your hands.
Tul. Know, mine depends
On thee.
Tit. On Titus! never can this trembling heart
Believe it: am I then no longer hated?
Speak on, my Tullia: O, what flatt'ring hope
Thus in a moment lifts me to the heighth
Of mortal bliſs!
Tul. Read this, and make thy ſelf,
[*Giving him the letter.*
Thy Tullia, and her father happy——Now
May I not hope——but wherefore that ſtern brow
And frowning aſpect? gods!
Tit. Of all mankind
Titus is ſure the moſt accurs'd: blind fate,
Bent on my ruin, ſhew'd me happineſs,
Then ſnatch'd it from me: to complete my woes,
It doom'd me to adore, and to deſtroy thee:
I love thee, and have loſt thee now for ever.
Tul. How, Titus!
Tit. Yes; this fatal hour condemns me
To ſhame and horror: to betray or Rome
Or Tullia: all that's left to my ſad choice
Is guilt, or miſery.

Tul. What ſay'ſt thou, Titus?
When with this hand I offer thee a throne;
Now when thou know'ſt my heart, for no longer
Will I conceal my virtuous paſſion for thee;
When duty yields a ſanction to our love;
Alas! I thought this happy day wou'd prove
The faireſt of my life, and yet the moment
When firſt my fearful heart, without a bluſh,
Might own its paſſion, is the firſt that calls,
For my repentance. Dar'ſt thou talk to me
Of guilt and miſery? Know, thus to ſerve
Ungrateful men againſt their lawful prince,
To ſcorn my proffer'd bounties, and oppreſs me,
Theſe are my mis'ries, Titus, theſe thy crimes.
Miſtaken youth, weigh in the even balance
What Rome refuſed, and what ſhe offers thee:
Or deal forth laws, or meanly ſtoop t'obey them:
Be govern'd by a rabble, or a king;
By Rome, or me: direct him right, ye gods!

Tit. My choice is made. [*Giving her back the letter.*

Tul. And fear'ſt thou to avow it?
Be bold, and ſpeak at once; deſerve my pardon,
Or merit my revenge: what's thy reſolve?

Tit. 'Tis to be worthy of thee, of myſelf,
And of my country; to be juſt, and faithful;
'Tis to adore and imitate thy virtues;
It is to loſe, O Tullia, yet deſerve thee.

Tul. For ever then———

Tit. Forgive me, deareſt Tullia;
Pity my weakneſs, and forget my love:
Pity a heart foe to itſelf, a heart
A thouſand times more wretched now than ev'n
When thou did'ſt hate me: O! I cannot leave,
I cannot follow thee; I cannot live
Or with thee or without thee; but will die
Rather than ſee thee given to another.

Tul. My heart's ſtill thine, and I forgive thee, Titus.

Tit. If thou do'ſt love me, Tullia, be a Roman;
Be more than queen, and love the common-weal:
Bring with thee patriot zeal, the love of Rome,

And

And of her ſacred laws, be that thy dowry:
Henceforth let Brutus be thy father, Rome
Thy mother, and her lov'd avenger, Titus,
Thy huſband: thus ſhall Romans yield the palm
Of glory to a Tuſcan maid, and owe
Their freedom to the daughter of a king.

Tul. And woud'ſt thou wiſh me to betray——

Tit. My ſoul,
Urg'd to deſpair, hath loſt itſelf: O no!
Treaſon is horrible in ev'ry ſhape,
And moſt unworthy of thee: well I know
A father's rights; his pow'r is abſolute,
And muſt not be diſputed: well I know
That Titus loves thee, that he is diſtracted.

Tul. Thou know'ſt what duty is, hear then the voice
Of Tullia's father.

Tit. And forget my own!
Forget my country!

Tul. Can'ſt thou call it thine
Without thy Tullia?

Tit. We are foes by nature:
The laws have laid a cruel duty on us.

Tul. Titus and Tullia foes! how cou'd that word
Ere paſs thy lips!

Tit. Thou know'ſt my heart belies them.

Tul. Dare then to ſerve, and if thou lov'ſt, revenge me.

SCENE VI.

BRUTUS, ARUNS, TITUS, TULLIA, MESSALA, ALBINUS, PROCULUS, LICTORS.

Bru. Madam, the time is come for your departure;
[*Addreſſing himſelf to* Tullia.
Whilſt public tumults ſhook the common-weal,
And the wild tempeſt howl'd around us, Rome

Cou'd not reſtore you to your houſhold gods:
Tarquin himſelf, in that diſaſtrous hour,
Too buſy in the ruin of his people
To think on Tullia, ne'er demanded thee.
Forgive me if I call thus to remembrance
Thy ſorrows paſt: I robb'd thee of a father,
And meet it is I prove a father to thee:
Go, princeſs, and may juſtice ever guard
The throne which heav'n hath call'd thee to poſſeſs!
If thou doſt hope obedience from thy ſubjects,
Obey the laws, and tremble for thyſelf,
When thou conſid'reſt all a ſov'reign's duty:
And if the fatal pow'rs of flatt'ry e'er
Shou'd from thy heart unlooſe the ſacred bonds
Of juſtice, think on Rome; remember Tarquin:
Let his example be th' inſtructive leſſon
To future kings, and make the world more happy.
Aruns, the ſenate gives her to thy care;
A father and a huſband at your hands
Expects her. Proculus attends you hence,
Far as the ſacred gate.

Tit. Deſpair, and horror! [*Apart.*
I will not ſuffer it—permit me, Sir,
[*Advancing towards* Aruns.

[Brutus *and* Tullia *with their Attendants go out, leaving* Aruns, *and* Meſſala.]

Gods! I ſhall die with grief and ſhame: but ſoft,
Aruns, I'd ſpeak with you.

Aru. My lord, the time
Is ſhort; I follow Brutus, and the princeſs;
Remember, I can put off her departure
But for an hour, and after that, my lord,
'Twill be too late to talk with me; within
We may confer on Tullia's fate, perhaps
On yours. [*Exit.*

SCENE

SCENE VII.

TITUS, MESSALA.

Tit. O cruel deſtiny! to join
And then divide us! Were we made, alas!
But to be foes! My friend, I beg thee ſtop
The tide of grief and rage.
Meſ. I weep to ſee
So many virtues and ſo many charms
Rewarded thus: a heart like her's deſerv'd
To have been thine, and thine alone.
Tit. O no!
Titus and Tullia ne'er ſhall be united.
Meſ. Wherefore, my Lord? what idle ſcruples riſe
To thwart your wiſhes?
Tit. The ungen'rous laws
She has impos'd upon me: cruel maid!
Muſt I then ſerve the tyrants I had conquer'd,
Muſt I betray the people I had ſav'd?
Shall love, whoſe pow'r I had ſo long defy'd,
At laſt ſubdue me thus? Shall I expoſe
My father to theſe proud deſpotic lords?
And ſuch a father, ſuch a fair example
To all mankind, the guardian of his country,
Whom long I follow'd in the paths of honour,
And might perhaps ev'n one day have excell'd;
Shall Titus fall from ſuch exalted virtue
To infamy and vice? deteſted thought!
Meſ. Thou art a Roman, riſe to nobler views,
And be a king; heav'n offers thee a throne:
Empire and love, and glory, and revenge
Await thee: this proud conſul, this ſupport
Of falling Rome, this idol of the people,
If fortune had not crown'd him with ſucceſs,
If Titus had not conquer'd for his father,
Had been a rebel: thou haſt gain'd the name
Of conqu'ror, now aſſume a nobler title;

Now be thy country's friend, and give her peace:
Reſtore the happy days, when, bleſt with freedom,
Not unreſtrain'd by pow'r, our anceſtors
Weigh'd in the even ſcale, and balanc'd well
The prince's honours and the people's right:
Rome's hate of kings is not immortal; ſoon
Wou'd it be chang'd to love if Titus reign'd:
For monarchy, ſo oft admir'd, ſo oft
Deteſted by us, is the beſt or worſt
Of human governments: a tyrant king
Will make it dreadful, and a good, divine.

Tit. Meſſala, doſt thou know me? Doſt thou know
I hold thee for a traitor, and myſelf
Almoſt as guilty for converſing with thee.

Meſ. Know thou, the honour thou contemn'ſt ſhall ſoon
Be wreſted from thee, and another hand
Perform thy office.

Tit. Ha! another! who?

Meſ. Thy brother.

Tit. Ay! my brother!

Meſ. He has giv'n
His faith to Tarquin.

Tit. Cou'd Tiberius e'er
Betray his country?

Meſ. He will ſerve his king,
And be a friend to Rome: in ſpite of thee,
Tarquin will give his daughter to the man
Who ſhall with warmeſt zeal defend his father.

Tit. Perfidious wretch! thou haſt miſled my ſteps,
And left me hanging o'er the precipice;
Left me the dreadful choice or to accuſe
My brother, or partake his guilt; but know,
Sooner thy blood——

Meſ. My life is in thy pow'r,
Take it this moment; I deſerve to die
For ſtriving to oblige you: ſhed the blood
Of friend, of miſtreſs, and of brother; lay
The breathleſs victims all before the ſenate,
And for thy virtues aſk the conſulſhip:
Or let me hence, and tell 'em all I know,

Accuſe

Accuſe my fellow-traitors, and myſelf
Begin the ſacrifice.
Tit. Meſſala, ſtop,
Or dread my deſperate rage.

SCENE VIII.

TITUS, MESSALA, ALBINUS.

Alb. Th' ambaſſador
Wou'd ſee you now, my lord; he's with the princeſs.
Tit. Yes, I will fly to Tullia: O ye gods
Of Rome, ye guardians of my much-lov'd country!
Pierce this corrupted this ungrateful heart:
Had Titus never lov'd, he had been virtuous:
And muſt I fall a ſacrifice to thee,
Deteſted ſenate! let us hence. [*Turning to* Meſſala.
Thou ſeeſt,
Meſſala, this proud capitol replete
With monuments of Titus' faith.
Meſ. 'Tis fill'd
By a proud ſenate.
Tit. Ay: I know it well:
But hark! I hear the voice of angry heav'n,
It ſpeaks to me in thunder, and cries, ſtop,
Ungrateful Titus, thou betray'ſt thy country:
No, Rome, no, Brutus, I am ſtill thy ſon:
O'er Titus head the ſun of glory ſtill
Hath ſhed his brighteſt rays; he never yet
Diſgrac'd his noble blood: your victim, gods,
Is ſpotleſs yet; and if this fatal day
Shall doom me to involuntary crimes,
If I muſt yield to fate, let Titus die
Whilſt he is innocent, and ſave his country.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

TITUS, ARUNS, MESSALA.

Tit. Urge me no more: I've heard too much already:
Shame and deſpair ſurround me, but begone,
I am reſolv'd: go, leave me to my ſorrows,
And to my virtue: reaſon pleads in vain,
But Tullia's tears are eloquent indeed:
One look from her will more unman my ſoul
Than all your tyrant's threats: but never more
Will I behold her; let her go: O heav'n!

Aru. I ſtaid but to oblige you, Sir, beyond
The time which you ſo earneſtly requeſted,
And which we ſcarce cou'd gain.

Tit. Did I requeſt it?

Aru. You did, my lord, and I in ſecret hop'd
A fairer fate wou'd crown your loves; but now
'Tis paſt; we muſt not think on't.

Tit. Cruel Aruns!
Thou haſt beheld my ſhame, and my diſgrace;
Thou haſt ſeen Titus for a moment doubtful:
Thou artful witneſs of my folly, hence!
And tell thy royal maſters all my weakneſs;
Tell the proud tyrants, that their conqueror,
The ſon of Brutus, wept before thy face;
But tell 'em too, that, ſpite of all my tears,
Spite of thy eloquence, and Tullia's charms,
I yet am free, a conqu'ror o'er myſelf:
That, ſtill a Roman, I will never yield
To Tarquin's blood, but ſwear eternal war
Againſt the race of her whom I adore.

Aru.

Aru. Titus, I pity and excuſe thy grief;
And, far from wiſhing to oppreſs thy heart
With added ſorrows, mix my ſighs with thine;
Only remember thou haſt kill'd thy Tullia.
Farewel, my lord.
Meſ. O heav'n!

SCENE II.

TITUS, MESSALA.

Tit. She muſt not go:
On peril of my life I'll keep her here.
Meſ. You wou'd not———
Tit. No: I'll not betray my country:
Rome may divide her from me, but ſhe ne'er
Can diſunite our fate; I live, and breath
For Tullia only, and for her will die.
Meſſala, haſte, have pity on my woes,
Gather our troops, aſſemble all our friends,
Spite of the ſenate I will ſtop her; ſay
She muſt remain a hoſtage here at Rome;
I'll do't Meſſala.
Meſ. To what deſp'rate means
Doth paſſion urge you? What will it avail
To make this fond avowal of your love?
Tit. Go to the ſenate, and appeal to them,
Try if thou can'ſt not ſoften the proud hearts
Of theſe imperious kings. Meſſala, tell 'em
The intereſt of Brutus, of the ſtate———
Alas! I rave, 'tis idle, and vain.
Meſ. I ſee you're hurt, my lord, and I will ſerve [you.
I go———
Tit. I'll ſee her: ſpeak to her, Meſſala,
She paſſes by this way, and I will take
My laſt farewel of her.

Meſ.

Meſ. You ſhall.
Tit. 'Tis ſhe:
Now I am loſt indeed.

SCENE III.

TITUS, MESSALA, TULLIA, ALGINA.

Alg. Madam, they wait.
Tul. Pity my hard, my cruel fate, Algina;
This baſe ungrateful man ſtill wounds my heart;
And Brutus, like a vengeful god, appears
To torture us: love, fear and grief, at once
Diſtract my ſoul: let us begone.
Tit. O no!
Stay, Tullia, deign at leaſt——
Tul. Barbarian, hence!
Think'ſt thou with ſoothing words——
Tit. Alas! my Tullia,
I only know in this diſaſtrous hour
What duty bids me do, not what I wou'd:
Reaſon no longer holds her empire here,
For thou haſt torn her from me, and uſurp'ſt
The pow'r ſupreme o'er this diſtracted mind:
Reign, tyrant, ſtretch thy cruel pow'r; command
Thy vaſſal; bid thy Titus ruſh on guilt;
Dictate his crimes, and make him wretched: No;
Sooner than Titus ſhall betray his country,
Give up his friends, his fellow citizens,
Thoſe whom his valour ſav'd, to fire and ſlaughter,
Sooner than leave his father to the ſword
Of Tarquin, know, proud woman——
Tul. Shield me, heav'n!
Thou plead'ſt the cauſe of nature, and her voice
Is dear to me as to thyſelf: thou, Titus,
Taught'ſt me long ſince to tremble for a father;
Brutus is mine: our blood united flows:
Can'ſt thou require a fairer pledge than love
And truth have giv'n thee: if I ſtay with thee,

I am

I am his daughter, and his hoſtage here.
Can'ſt thou yet doubt? think'ſt thou in ſecret Brutus
Wou'd not rejoice to ſee thee on a throne?
He hath not plac'd indeed a diadem
On his own brows, but is he not a king
Beneath another name? and one year's reign
Perhaps may bring——but theſe are fruitleſs reaſons.
If thou no longer lov'ſt me—one word more,
Farewel: I leave, and I adore thee, Titus:
Thou weep'ſt, thou trembleſt; yet a little time
Is left for thee, ſpeak, tell me, cruel man,
What more can'ſt thou deſire?

Tit. Thy hatred; that
Alone remains to make me truly wretched.

Tul. It is too much to bear thy cauſeleſs plaints;
To hear thee talk of fancy'd injuries,
With idle dreams of viſionary ties:
Take back thy love, take back thy faithleſs vows,
Worſe than thy baſe refuſal: I deſpiſe them.
Think not I mean to ſearch in Italy
The fatal grandeur which I ſacrific'd
To Titus' love, and in another's arms
Lament the weakneſs which I felt for thee;
My fate's determin'd: learn, proud Roman, thou
Whoſe ſavage virtue riſes but t'oppreſs
A helpleſs woman, coward, when I aſk
Thy aid, and only valiant to deſtroy me,
Fickle and wav'ring in thy faith, of me
Learn to fulfil thy vows; thou ſhalt behold
A woman, in thy eyes howe'er contemn'd,
Howe'er deſpis'd, unſhaken in her purpoſe,
And by her firmneſs ſee how much ſhe lov'd thee.
Titus, beneath theſe walls, the rev'rend ſeat
Of my great anceſtors, which thou defend'ſt
Againſt their rightful lord; this fatal ſpot
Where thou haſt dar'd t'inſult and to betray me;
Where firſt thy faithleſs vows deceiv'd me; there
Ev'n there, by all the gods, who ſtore up vengeance
For perjur'd men, I ſwear to thee, O Titus,
This arm, more juſt than thine, and more reſolv'd,
Shall puniſh ſoon my fond credulity,

And

And waſh out all my inj'ries in my blood:
I go——

Tit. No, Tullia, hear and then condemn me;
You ſhall be ſatisfy'd; I fly to pleaſe you,
Yet ſhudder at it: I am ſtill more wretched,
Becauſe my guilty ſoul has no excuſe,
No poor deluſion left. I have not ev'n
The joy of ſelf-deceit to ſooth my ſorrows:
No, thou haſt conquer'd, not betray'd me, Tullia;
I loath the fatal paſſion which I feel,
And ruſh on vice, yet know and honour virtue.
Hate me, avoid me, leave a guilty wretch
Who dies for love, yet hates himſelf for loving;
Nor fears to mix his future fate with thine,
'Midſt crimes, and horrors, perjury, and death.

Tul. You know too well your influence o'er my heart;
Mock my fond paſſion, and inſult my love;
Yet, Titus, 'tis for thee alone I live,
For thee wou'd die: yet, ſpite of all my love,
And all my weakneſs, death were far more welcome
Than the reluctant hand of cruel Titus,
Who is aſham'd to ſerve his royal maſter,
And bluſhes to accept a kingdom from me.
The dreadful hour of ſeparation comes,
Think on it, Titus, and remember well
That Tullia loves, and offers thee a throne.
Th' ambaſſador expects me; fare thee well,
Delib'rate and determine: an hour hence
Again thou ſhalt behold me with my father:
When I return to theſe deteſted walls
Know, Titus, I'll return a queen, or periſh.

Tit. Thou ſhall not die: I go——

Tul. Stop, Titus, ſtop;
If thou ſhou'dſt follow me, thy life's in danger,
Thou'lt be ſuſpected; therefore ſtay: farewel;
Reſolve to be my murth'rer, or my huſband.

SCENE

SCENE IV.

TITUS alone.

O Tullia, thou haſt conquer'd, Rome's enſlav'd:
Return to rule o'er her and o'er my life,
Devoted to thee: haſte, I fly to crown thee,
Or periſh in th' attempt: the worſt of crimes
Were to abandon thee. Now, where's Meſſala?
My headſtrong paſſion hath at length worn out
His patient friendſhip; miſtreſs, Romans, friends,
All in one fatal day, hath Titus loſt.

SCENE V.

TITUS, MESSALA.

Tit. O my Meſſala, help me in my love,
And my revenge: away; haſte, follow me.
Meſ. Command, and I obey: my troops are ready
At the Quirinal mount to give us up
The gates, and all my gallant friends have ſworn
T'acknowledge Titus as the rightful heir
Of Tarquin: loſe no time; propitious night
Already offers her kind ſhade to veil
Our great deſign.
Tit. The hour approaches: Tullia
Will count each minute: Tarquin, after all,
Had my firſt oaths: away; the dye is caſt.
[*The lower part of the ſtage opens and diſcovers* Brutus.
What do I ſee; my father!

SCENE

SCENE VI.

BRUTUS, TITUS, MESSALA, LICTORS.

Bru. Titus, haſte,
Rome is in danger; thou art all our hope:
Secret inſtructions have been giv'n the ſenate
That Rome will be attack'd at dead of night,
And I have gain'd for my beloved Titus
The firſt command in this extremity
Of public danger. Arm thyſelf, my ſon,
And fly, a ſecond time, to ſave thy country;
Hazard thy life once more in the great cauſe
Of liberty; or victory or death
Muſt crown thy days, and I ſhall envy thee.
Tit. O heav'n!
Bru. My ſon!
Tit. To other hands commit
The ſenate's favours, and the fate of Rome.
Meſ. What ſtrange diſorder has poſſeſs'd his ſoul!
Bru. Doſt thou refuſe the proffer'd glory?
Tit. I!
Shall I, my lord—
Bru. Ha! doth thy heart ſtill burn
With proud reſentment of thy fancy'd wrongs?
Is this a time, my ſon, for fond caprice?
Can he who ſav'd his country be unhappy?
Immortal honour! will not that ſuffice
Without the conſulſhip? The laws thou know'ſt,
Refus'd it, Titus, to thy youth alone,
Not to thy merit: think no more of that:
Go; I have plac'd thee in the poſt of honour;
Let tyrants only feel thy indignation;
Give Rome thy life; aſk nothing in return,
But be a hero; be yet more, my ſon,
A Roman: I am haſt'ning to the end
Of my ſhort journey; thy victorious hands
Muſt cloſe my eyes; ſupported by thy virtues,

My

My name ſhall never die; I ſhall revive
And live once more in Titus: but perhaps
It is decreed that I muſt follow thee;
Old age is weak; but I will ſee thee conquer,
Or periſh with thee, Rome's avenger ſtill!,
Free, and without a maſter.

Tit. O Meſſala!

SCENE VII.

BRUTUS, VALERIUS, TITUS, MESSALA.

Val. My lord, let all retire.

Bru. Run, fly, my ſon— [*To* Titus.

Val. Rome is betray'd.

Bru. What do I hear?

Val. There's treaſon;
We're ſold, my lord, the author's yet unknown;
But Tarquin's name is echo'd through our ſtreets,
And worthleſs Romans talk of yielding to him.

Bru. Ha! wou'd the citizens of Rome be ſlaves!

Val. Yes: the perfidious traitors fled from me;
I've ſent in queſt of them: much I ſuſpect
Menas and Lælius, the baſe partizans
Of tyranny and kings, the ſecret foes
Of Rome, and ever glad to diſunite
The ſenate and the people: if I err not,
Protected by Meſſala, who himſelf,
But for his friendſhip with the noble Titus,
I almoſt think, has join'd them.

Bru. We'll obſerve
Their ſteps with caution; more cannot be done:
The liberty and laws which we defend
Forbid that rigor which I fear is needful;
But to detain a Roman on ſuſpicions,
Were to reſemble thoſe uſurping tyrants
Whom we wou'd puniſh: let us to the people,
Awake the fearful, give the virtuous praiſe,

Aſtoniſh

Aſtoniſh the perfidious: let the fathers
Of Rome and liberty revive the warmth
Of Roman courage: who will not be bold
When we appear? O rather give us death,
Ye gods! than ſlav'ry: let the ſenate follow.

SCENE VIII.

BRUTUS, VALERIUS, PROCULUS.

Pro. A ſlave, my lord, deſires a private audience.
Bru. At this late hour of night!
Pro. He brings you news,
He ſays, of higheſt import.
Bru. Ha! perhaps
Rome's ſafety may depend on it: away:
[*To* Proculus.
A moment's loſs might hazard all—go thou
And ſeek my ſon: let the Quirinal gate
Be his firſt care; and may the world confeſs,
When they behold his glorious deeds, the race
Of Brutus was decreed to conquer kings.

ACT V. SCENE I.

BRUTUS, SENATORS, PROCULUS, LICTORS, VINDEX, a Slave.

Bru. A little more and Tarquin arm'd with vengeance,
This night had ruſh'd upon us; Rome had fall'n,
And freedom ſunk beneath the tyrant's pow'r:
This

This ſubtle ſtateſman, this ambaſſador,
Had open'd wide the fatal precipice:
Wou'd you believe it, ev'n the ſons of Rome
United to betray her: falſe Meſſala
Urg'd on their furious zeal, and ſold his country
To this perfidious Aruns; but kind heav'n,
Still watchful o'er the fate of Rome, preſerv'd us.
[*Pointing to* Vindex.
This ſlave o'er heard it all; his faithful councils
Awak'd my fears, and fill'd my aged breaſt
With double vigour: I had ſeiz'd Meſſala,
And hoped by tortures to have wreſted from him
The names of his aſſociates; but, behold,
Surrounded by my lictors, on a ſudden
He from his boſom drew a poniard forth,
Deſign'd no doubt for other purpoſes,
And cry'd, if you wou'd know Meſſala's ſecrets,
Look for them here, within this bleeding breaſt;
He, who has courage to conſpire 'gainſt you,
Can keep the council which he gives, and die:
Then, as tumultuouſly they gather'd round him,
Pierc'd his falſe heart, and like a Roman dy'd,
Tho' he had liv'd unworthy of the name.
Already Aruns was beyond the walls
Of Rome; our guards purſued him to the camp
Stopp'd him with Tullia, and ere long will bring
The traitor here, when heav'n, I truſt, will ſoon
Unravel all their dark and deadly purpoſe.
Valerius will detect 'em: but remember,
Friends, Romans, countrymen, I charge you all,
When ye ſhall know the names of theſe vile ſlaves,
Theſe parricides, nor pardon nor indulgence
Be ſhewn to friends, to brothers, nay to children;
Think on their crime alone, preſerve your faith,
For liberty and Rome demands their blood,
And he, who pardons guilt like theirs, partakes it.
[*To the ſlave.*
Thou, whoſe blind deſtiny and lowly birth
Made thee a ſlave, who ſhoud'ſt have been a Roman;
Thou, by whoſe gen'rous aid the ſenate lives,
And Rome is ſafe, receive that liberty

Thou

Thou haſt beſtow'd; henceforth let nobler thoughts
Inſpire thy ſoul; be equal to my ſons,
The dread of tyrants, the delight of Rome.
But whence this tumult? Hark!
Pro. Th' ambaſſador
Is ſeiz'd my lord, and they have brought him hither.
Bru. How will he dare——

SCENE II.

BRUTUS, SENATORS, ARUNS, LICTORS.

Aru. How long, inſulting Roman,
Will you thus violate the ſacred rights
Of all mankind? How long by faction led
Thus in their miniſters diſhonour kings?
Your lictors have with inſolence detain'd me:
Is it my maſter you thus treat with ſcorn,
Or Aruns? Know, my rank reſpectable
In ev'ry nation——
Bru. The more ſacred that,
More guilty thou; talk not of titles here.
Aru. A king's ambaſſador——
Bru. Thou art not one:
Thou art a traitor, with a noble name,
Embolden'd by impunity: for know
That, true ambaſſadors interpret laws,
But never break them; ſerve their king, but ne'er
Diſhonour him; with them repos'd in ſafety
Lie the firm ties of faith t'wixt man and man;
And of their holy miniſtry the fruit
Is grateful peace: they are the ſacred bonds
That knit the ſov'reigns of the earth together;
And, as the friends of all, by all rever'd.
Aſk thy own heart if thou art ſuch; thou dar'ſt not:
But if thy maſter bade thee learn our laws,
Our virtues, and our treaſures, we will teach thee
Now what Rome is, and what a Roman ſenate:
Will teach thee that this people ſtill reſpects

The

The law of nations, which thou haſt diſhonour'd:
The only puniſhment inflicted on thee,
Shall be to ſee thy vile aſſociates bleed,
And tell thy king their folly and their fate.
When thou return'ſt, be ſure inform thy friends
Of Rome's reſentment, and thy own diſgrace:
Lictors, away with him.

SCENE III.

BRUTUS, VALERIUS, PROCULUS, SENATORS.

Bru. Well, my Valerius,
They're ſeiz'd I hope, at leaſt you know the traitors:
Ha! wherefore is that melancholy gloom
Spread o'er thy face, preſaging greater ills?
Thou trembleſt too.
Val. Remember thou art Brutus.
Bru. Explain thyſelf.
Val. I dare not ſpeak it it: take
[*Gives him the tablets.*
Theſe tablets, read, and know the guilty.
Bru. Ha!
My eyes deceive me; ſure it cannot be!
O heavy hour! and moſt unhappy father!
My ſon! Tiberius! pardon me, my friends,
Unlook'd for mis'ry! Have you ſeiz'd the traitor?
Val. My lord, with two of the conſpirators,
He ſtood on his defence, and rather choſe
To die than yield himſelf a pris'ner: cloſe
By them he fell all cover'd o'er with wounds:
But O! there ſtill remains a tale more dreadful
For thee, for Rome, and for us all.
Bru. What is it?
Val. Once more, my lord, look on that fatal ſcroll
Which Proculus had wreſted from Meſſala.
Bru. I tremble, but I will go on: ha! Titus!
[*He ſinks into the arms of* Proculus.

Val.

Val. Diſarm'd I found him, wand'ring in deſpair
And horror, as if conſcious of a crime
Which he abhorr'd.
Bru. Return, ye conſcript fathers,
Strait to the ſenate; Brutus hath no place
Amongſt you now: go paſs your judgment on him;
Exterminate the guilty race of Brutus;
Puniſh the father in the blood of him
Who was my child: I ſhall not follow you,
Or to ſuſpend or mitigate the wrath
Of injur'd Rome.

SCENE IV.

BRUTUS alone.

Great gods! to your decrees
I yield ſubmiſſive, to the great avengers
Of Rome, and of her laws: by you inſpir'd
I rear'd the ſtructure of fair liberty
On juſtice and on truth; and will you now
O'erthrow it? will you arm my children's hands
'Gainſt your own work? Was it not woe enough
That fierce Tiberius, blind with furious zeal,
Shou'd ſerve the tyrant, and betray his country?
But that my Titus too, the joy of Rome,
Who, full of honour, but this very day
Enjoy'd a triumph for his victories,
Crown'd in the capitol by Brutus' hand,
Titus, the hope of my declining years,
The darling of mankind, that Titus——gods!

SCENE V.

BRUTUS, VALERIUS, LICTORS, ATTENDANTS.

Val. My lord, the ſenate have decreed, yourſelf
Shou'd paſs the ſentence on your guilty ſon.

Bru.

Bru. Myſelf!
Val. It muſt be ſo.
Bru. Touching the reſt,
Say, what have they determin'd?
Val. All condemn'd
To death; ev'n now perhaps they are no more.
Bru. And have the ſenate left to my diſpoſal
The life of Titus?
Val. They eſteem this honour
Due to thy virtues.
Bru. O my country!
Val. What
Muſt I return in anſwer to the ſenate?
Bru. That Brutus knows the value of a favour
He ſought not, but ſhall ſtudy to deſerve it.
But cou'd my ſon without reſiſtance yield?
Cou'd he——forgive my doubts, but Titus ever
Was Rome's beſt guard, and ſtill I feel I love him.
Val. Tullia, my lord——
Bru. Well what of her?
Val. Confirm'd
Our juſt ſuſpicions.
Bru. How!
Val. Soon as ſhe ſaw,
In her return, the dreadful preparation
Of torture for th' offenders, at our feet
She fell, and ſoon in agonies expir'd;
The laſt poor victim of the hated race
Of tyrants: doubtleſs 'twas for her, my lord,
Rome was betray'd: I feel a father's grief,
And weep for Brutus; but in her laſt moments
This way ſhe turn'd her eyes, and call'd on Titus.
Bru. Juſt gods!
Val. Thou art his judge, perform thy office,
Or ſtrike, or ſpare; acquit him, or condemn;
Rome will approve what Brutus ſhall determine.
Bru. Lictors, bring Titus hither.
Val. I retire,
And truſt thy virtue; my aſtoniſh'd ſoul
Admires and pities thee: I go to tell

The ſenate, nought can equal Brutus' grief
But Brutus' firmneſs.

SCENE VI.

BRUTUS, PROCULUS.

Bru. No: the more I think,
The leſs can I believe my ſon cou'd e'er
Conſpire with traitors to betray his country:
No: he lov'd Rome too well; too well he lov'd
His father: ſure we cannot thus forget
Our duty and ourſelves in one ſhort day:
I cannot think my ſon was guilty ſtill.
Pro. 'Twas all conducted by Meſſala; he
Perhaps deſign'd to ſhelter his own crimes
Beneath the name of Titus; his accuſers
Envy his glory, and wou'd fain obſcure it.
Bru. O! wou'd to heav'n it were ſo!
Pro. He's thy ſon,
Thy only hope; and innocent or guilty,
The ſenate has to thee reſign'd his fate:
His life is ſafe whilſt in the hands of Brutus;
Thou wilt preſerve a great man for his country;
Thou art a father.
Bru. No: I am Rome's conſul.

SCENE VII.

BRUTUS, PROCULUS, TITUS at the further end of the ſtage, guarded by Lictors.

Pro. He comes.
Tit. 'Tis Brutus: O diſtreſsful ſight! [*Advancing.*
Open, thou earth, beneath my trembling ſteps!
My lord, permit a ſon——

Bru.

Bru. Raſh boy, forbear:
I was the father of two children once,
And lov'd them both; but one is loſt: what ſay'ſt thou?
Speak, Titus, have I yet a ſon?
Tit. O no:
Thou haſt not.
Bru. Anſwer then thy judge, thou ſhame
To Brutus; ſay, did'ſt thou betray thy country,
Give up thy father to a tyrant's pow'r
And break thy ſolemn vows? Did'ſt thou reſolve
To do this, Titus?
Tit. I reſolv'd on nothing.
Fill'd with a deadly poiſon that poſſeſs'd
My frantic mind, I did not know myſelf,
Nor do I yet; and my diſtemper'd ſoul,
In its wild rage, was for a moment guilty;
That moment cloath'd me with eternal ſhame,
And made me falſe to what I lov'd, my country:
'Tis paſt; and anguiſh and remorſe ſucceed
T' avenge their wrongs, and ſcourge me for the crime.
Pronounce my ſentence: Rome, that looks upon thee,
Wants an example, and demands my life:
By my deſerved fate ſhe may deter
Thoſe of her ſons, if any ſuch there be,
Who might be tempted to a crime like mine.
In death at leaſt thus ſhall I ſerve my country;
Thus ſhall my blood, which never till this hour
Was ſtain'd with guilt, ſtill flow for liberty.
Bru. Unnat'ral mixture! perfidy and courage;
Such horrid crimes with ſuch exalted virtue!
With all thy dear-bought laurels on thy brow,
What pow'r malignant cou'd inſpire thee thus
With vile inconſtancy?
Tit. The thirſt of vengeance,
Ambition, hatred, madneſs; all united——
Bru. Go on, unhappy youth.
Tit. One error more,
And worſe than all the reſt; one cruel flame;
That fir'd my guilt, and ſtill perhaps augments it,
Compleated my deſtruction: to confeſs it
Is double ſhame, to Rome of little ſervice,

And moſt unworthy of us both; I own it:
But I have reach'd the ſummit of my guilt,
And of my ſorrows too: end with my life
My crimes, and my deſpair, my ſhame and thine.
But if in battle I have trac'd [*Kneeling.*
Thy glorious ſteps; if I have follow'd thee,
And ſerv'd my country; if remorſe and anguiſh
Already have o'erpaid my crimes; O deign
Within thy arms once more to hold a wretch
Abandon'd and forlorn: O ſay, at leaſt,
My ſon, thy father hates thee not: that word
Alone my fame and virtue ſhall reſtore,
And ſave my mem'ry from the brand of ſhame.
The world will ſay, when Titus dy'd, a look
From you reliev'd him from his load of grief,
And made him full amends for all his ſorrows;
Spite of his guilt, that ſtill eſteem'd by thee,
He bore thy bleſſing with him to the grave.

Bru. O Rome! his pangs oppreſs me: O my country!
Proculus, ſee they lead my ſon to death.
Riſe, wretched Titus, thou wert once the hope
Of my old age, my beſt ſupport; embrace
Thy father who condemn'd thee: 'twas his duty.
Were he not Brutus, he had pardon'd thee:
Believe my tears that trickle down my cheeks
Whilſt I am ſpeaking to thee: O, my Titus,
Let nobler courage than thy father ſhews
Support thee in thy death; my ſon, farewel:
Let no unmanly tears diſgrace thy fall,
But be a Roman ſtill, and let thy country,
That knows thy worth, admire while ſhe deſtroys thee.

Tit. Farewel: I go to death; in that at leaſt
Titus once more ſhall emulate his father.

SCENE VIII.

BRUTUS, PROCULUS.

Pro. My lord, the ſenate, with ſincereſt grief,
And ſhudd'ring at the dreadful ſtroke——

Bru.

Bru. No more:
Ye know not Brutus who condole with him
At ſuch a time: Rome only is my care;
I feel but for my country: we muſt guard
Againſt more danger: they're in arms again:
Away: let Rome in this diſaſtrous hour
Supply the place of him whom I have loſt
For her, and let me finiſh my ſad days,
As Titus ſhou'd have done, in Rome's defence.

SCENE the LAST.

BRUTUS, PROCULUS, a SENATOR.

Sen. My lord———
Bru. My ſon is dead?
Sen. 'Tis ſo: theſe eyes—
Bru. Thank heav'n! Rome's free; and I am ſatisfy'd.

End of the Last Act.

A

DISSERTATION

On ANTIENT and MODERN

TRAGEDY:

IN

A LETTER to Cardinal QUIRINI, a Noble VENETIAN, Biſhop of BRESCIA, and Keeper of the VATICAN LIBRARY.

MY LORD,

WELL did it become a genius like yours, and one who preſides over the moſt antient library in the world, to give yourſelf intirely up to letters. Such heads of our church we may expect to ſee under a pontiff who inſtructed the chriſtian world before he was appointed to rule over it: but if literature in general ſtands indebted to you, ſtill greater are my own obligations for the honour which you did me in tranſlating my Henriade, and the poem of Fontenoy, into ſuch

elegant verſe. The two virtuous heroes whom I celebrated are become yours. You have condeſcended to embelliſh my works, that you might render the names of Henry IV. and Lewis XV. ſtill more illuſtrious, and ſpread a taſte for the polite arts throughout all Europe.

Amongſt the many obligations which we of later ages have to the Italians, and particularly to the Popes and their miniſters, we muſt not paſs over the cultivation and improvement of the Belles-Lettres, which have ſoften'd by degrees the groſs and barbarous manners of our northern climates, and to which we are in a great meaſure indebted for our politeneſs, our happineſs, and our glory.

Under the great Leo X. with Grecian eloquence revived alſo the Grecian theatre. The Sophoniſba of the celebrated prelate Triſſino, the pope's nuncio, was the firſt regular tragedy ſeen in Europe after ſo many ages of barbariſm: in like manner as the Calandra of cardinal Bibiena had been before that time the firſt comedy in modern Italy: you were the firſt that built ſpacious theatres, and gave the world ſome idea of that ſplendor of antient Greece, which drew together ſo many foreign nations at its ſolemn feſtivals, and became the univerſal model of perfection in every art and ſcience.

If your nation has not always equall'd the antients in tragedy, it is not to be attributed to your language, which is copious, flexible, and harmonious, adapted to all ſubjects: but it is in my opinion extremely probable, that the great progreſs you have made in muſic has in ſome meaſure put a ſtop to your improvement in tragedy: one perfection has deſtroy'd another.

Permit

Permit me then to enter into a literary diſcuſſion with your lordſhip, on this head. Some people, perhaps, who are uſed to the general ſtile of dedications, will be ſurpriz'd to find me comparing Greek with modern cuſtoms, inſtead of comparing the great men of antiquity with thoſe of your illuſtrious houſe: but I am talking to a man of letters, and a philoſopher; to one from whoſe knowledge I may receive improvement; with whom I have the honour to be aſſociated in the moſt antient academy in Europe, whoſe members often employ themſelves in reſearches of this nature: I am ſpeaking, in ſhort, to one who had much rather give me inſtructions, than receive encomiums from me.

PART the FIRST.

On the Imitation of the GREEK *Tragedy in the* ITALIAN *and* FRENCH *Operas.*

One of your moſt celebrated authors tells us, that ſince the golden period in Athens, tragedy, deſerted and forſaken, wanders about from country to country in ſearch of ſome kind friend, that will aſſiſt and reſtore her to her former honours, but has as yet found none: if he means by this, that no nation amongſt the moderns has theatres where the choruſſes are almoſt always upon the ſtage, ſinging ſtrophes, antiſtrophes, and epodes, accompany'd with ſerious dances; that we do not ſet our actors upon ſtilts, or cover their faces with maſks that expreſs joy on one ſide and grief on the other: if he means that the declamation of your tragedies is not noted and accompany'd with in-

ſtruments, he is certainly in the right, and I don't know whether all this is not rather in our favour; perhaps our manner, by approaching more nearly to nature, is full as eligible as that of the Greeks, which had much more ſplendor and magnificence.

But if he only deſign'd to inſinuate, that this noble art is not in general ſo much conſider'd ſince the reſtoration of letters as it was formerly; that there are nations in Europe who have treated with ingratitude the ſucceſſors of Sophocles and Euripides; that our theatres are not like thoſe ſuperb edifices which the Athenians were ſo proud of; and that we do not take the ſame pains as they did in repreſentations, which are become ſo neceſſary in large and opulent cities; we cannot but intirely agree with him.

Et ſapit, & mecum facit, & Jove judicat æquo.

Where ſhall we find any public ſpectacle at preſent that can give us any idea of the Greek ſtage? perhaps in your tragedies, or operas: what, ſay the critics, an Italian opera like the theatre of Athens! yes, the Italian recitative is exactly the melopæa of the antients, a declamation in notes, and accompany'd with inſtruments of muſic: this melopæa, which is tireſome and diſagreeable in your bad tragic operas, is admirable in thoſe few which are good. The choruſſes which you have added of late years approach ſtill nearer to the antient chorus, as the muſic in them is different from that of the recitative; in the ſame manner as the ſtrophe, antiſtrophe, and epode, among the Greeks, were ſet to muſic, tho' they differ'd from the melopæa of the dialogue: add to this, that in many

many of the tragic operas of the famous Metaſtaſio, the unities of place, time, and action, are obſerv'd; beſides that, thoſe pieces abound in that expreſſive poetry, and elegance of diction, which embelliſh nature without over-loading her; a happy talent, which none of the moderns have poſſeſs'd but Racine amongſt us, and, of all the Engliſh writers, Addiſon alone.

I am ſufficiently aware, that theſe tragedies, which are ſo agreeable from the muſic, and magnificence of the ſpectacle, have indeed one fault which the Greeks always avoided; a fault which has often turn'd pieces finely written, and in all other reſpects extremely regular, into monſtrous and unnatural productions; I mean, the fault of bringing into every ſcene little airs and catches that interrupt the action, merely to ſhew off the quavers of an effeminate voice, that exerts itſelf to the utter deſtruction of probability and good ſenſe. The excellent author, whom I juſt now mention'd, and who has taken ſeveral of his tragedies from French writers, has, by the force of genius, remedy'd in ſome meaſure this abſurdity, which is become as it were neceſſary. The words of his airs or ſonnets embelliſh the ſubject: they are full of pathos and paſſion, and ſometimes not inferior to the fineſt odes of Horace; for a proof of which I ſhall beg leave to quote that very affecting ſtrophe ſung by Arbaces, who is ſuppos'd to have been falſely accuſed.

Vo ſolcando un mar crudele
Senza vele
E ſenza ſarte
Freme l'onda, il ciel s'imbruna,
Creſci il vento, e manca l'arte:
E il voler della fortuna

Son coſtretto a ſeguitar.
Infelice in quello ſtato.
Son da tutti abbandonato;
Meco ſola è l'innocenza
Che mi porta a naufragar.

To this I will beg leave to add another fine air, ſung by the king of the Parthians, conquer'd by Adrian, when he endeavours to render even his defeat ſubſervient to his revenge.

Sprezza il furor del vento
Robuſta quercia auvezza.
Di cento venti è cento
L'injurie a tolerar.
E ſe pur cade al ſuolo
Spiega per l'onde il volo;
E con quel vento iſteſſo
Va contraſtando il mar.

There are beſides theſe many others of equal merit; but what are the greateſt beauties when out of their proper p'ace? What would an Athenian audience have ſaid, if Oedipus and Oreſtes, juſt in the very minute of the diſcovery, the moſt intereſting part of the drama, had entertained them with quavering out a fine air, or repeated ſimilies to Electra and Jocaſta! We muſt therefore after all acknowledge, that the opera, ſo bewitching to an Italian ear by its muſical attractions, tho' on the one hand it may be ſaid to have reviv'd, has notwithſtanding on the other, in effect, deſtroy'd the true Greek tragedy.

Our French opera deviates ſtill more from the right point: as our melopæa differs more than yours from natural declamation, and is withal more

more languid. It will not allow our ſcenes their proper length, but requires ſhort dialogues and little ſententious remarks, every one of which makes a kind of ſonnet.

Let thoſe, who are thoroughly acquainted with the ſtate of literature in other nations, and whoſe knowledge is not confined to the airs of our own ballads, recollect that admirable ſcene in la Clemenza di Tito, between Titus and his favorite, who had conſpir'd againſt him: I mean the ſcene where Titus addreſſes himſelf to Seſtus in theſe divine words:

Siam ſoli, il tuo ſovrano
Non è preſente: apri il tuo core à Tito,
Confida ti all' ami'co; io ti prometto
Qu' Auguſto n'ol ſaprà.

Or let them read the ſoliloquy that follows, where Titus has theſe words, words which ſhou'd be an eternal leſſon for kings, and the admiration of all mankind.

——— Il torre altrui la vita
E faculta commune
Al piu vil della terra; il dar la è ſolo
De' numi, & de' regnanti'..

Theſe two ſcenes, comparable to the fineſt which Greece ever produced, if not ſuperior to them; theſe two ſcenes, worthy of Corneille when he is no declaimer, or of Racine when he is not flimſy; theſe two ſcenes, which are not founded on opera love, but on the nobleſt ſentiments of the human heart, are at leaſt three times as long as the longeſt ſcenes in our muſical tragedies: but theſe would not be borne on our Lyric theatre, which is only

ſupported

ſupported by maxims of gallantry, and ill painted paſſions, except the Armida, and ſome fine ſcenes in Iphigenia, works more admir'd than imitated amongſt us.

Amongſt the many faults of our operas, we have, like you, a number of little detach'd airs, even in the moſt tragical parts; and which are more inexcuſable than yours, becauſe they have leſs affinity to the ſubject: the words are generally ſubmitted intirely to the compoſers, who not being able to expreſs themſelves in the manly and vigorous terms of our language, require ſoft, vague, and effeminate words, foreign to the action, and adapted as well as they can to little ballads, like thoſe which at Venice are call'd *Barcarole*. Where, for inſtance, is the connection between Theſeus, juſt diſcover'd by his father on the point of being poiſon'd by him, and this ridiculous ſpeech?

* Le plus ſage
S'enflamme & s'engage
Sans ſcavoir comment.

But with all theſe faults I am ſtill of opinion, that our good tragic operas, ſuch as Atys, Armida, and Theſeus may give us ſome idea of the Greek theatre, becauſe they are ſung like the antient tragedies, and becauſe the chorus, even defective as it now is, conſiſting of tedious panegyrics on the † morality of love, does notwithſtanding, in ſome

* i. e. The wiſeſt men often fall in love, and engage themſelves they know not how.

† The original is '*la morale amoureuſe*,' perhaps none but a Frenchman can rightly comprehend that Mr. V. means by this expreſſion: the *morality of love*, as I have literally tranſlated it, does not convey to us the true and preciſe idea: I ſhould be oblig'd to any of my readers, who are converſant with French operas, for a better interpretation of it.

ſome meaſure, reſemble the Grecian chorus, by continuing on the ſtage almoſt throughout the piece. It does not indeed, amongſt us, always ſay what it ought to ſay, nor inculcate virtue;

Et regat iratos, & amet peccare timentes;

but, upon the whole, one may venture to aſſert, that the form of our tragic operas, conſider'd with regard to ſome particulars, reminds us of the antient Greek tragedy. Several learned men, who are well acquainted with the works of antiquity, ſeem to think with me, that they are at once the copy and the deſtruction of the Athenian ſtage; a copy of it, as they admit of the melopæa, the choruſſes, machines, and deities, and at the ſame time the deſtruction of it; as they have taught our young men to be fonder of ſound than ſenſe; to prefer the tickling of their ears to the improvement of their minds; the nonſenſe of ſing-ſong to the ſublimity of ſentiment; and have beſides contributed to the ſucceſs of many inſipid and ill-written performances, which have been ſupported by a few pleaſing airs: and yet, in ſpite of all theſe faults, that inchantment which ariſes from a happy mixture of fine ſcenes, choruſſes, dances, ſymphony, and a variety of decorations, bears all before it, and ſilences even criticiſm itſelf; inſomuch that the beſt comedy, or tragedy we have is never ſeen ſo often by the ſame people with half the pleaſure as a midling opera. Beauties which are regular, noble, and ſevere, are ſeldom much ſought after by vulgar minds. Cinna, perhaps, is play'd for two or three nights; and the Venetian Feſtival ſhall run three months: a licentious epigram has more readers than an epic poem, and a little romance ſhall meet with more admirers than Thuanus's hiſtory. Our nobility very ſeldom employ

good

good painters, and at the ſame time will quarrel about the diſtorted figures, and brittle ornaments from China. We gild and varniſh cabinets, yet neglect true architecture: in ſhort, real merit is overlook'd in almoſt every art and ſcience, in favour of agreeable trifles.

PART the SECOND.

FRENCH *and* GREEK *tragedy compared.*

Happily for us, true tragedy appear'd before any of our operas, which might have ſtifled and ſuppreſs'd it. Mairet was the firſt writer, who, in a tragedy imitated from the Sophoniſba of Triſſino, introduc'd the three unities which you had taken from the Greeks. By degrees our ſtage became more and more refined, and ſhookoff that indecency and barbariſm which diſgraced ſo many others about this period, and ſerv'd at the ſame time for an excuſe to thoſe whoſe unenlighten'd ſeverity of manners baniſh'd all public repreſentations.

Our actors did not indeed appear like thoſe of Athens, lifted up on cothurni, which were abſolutely ſtilts, nor were their faces hid under enormous maſks with braſs pipes to them, to increaſe the ſound of the voice, and make it more ſonorous and terrible: neither had we the melopæa of the Greeks, nor any thing beſides a ſimple harmonious declamation, the ſame which you had for ſome time practis'd. In ſhort, our tragedies were a cloſer imitation of nature: we ſubſtituted hiſtory in the room of Greek fables; politics, ambition, love and jealouſy took their turns to imitate the ſcene; whilſt Auguſtus, Cinna, Cæſar and Cornelia, names far more reſpectable than the fabulous heroes of antiquity, often made their appearance

pearance on our ſtage, and ſpoke as they wou'd have done in antient Rome.

I ſhall not pretend to aſſert, that the French theatre was in all reſpects ſuperior to the Greek, and ought to bury it in oblivion: Inventors have always held the firſt place in the memories of men; but whatever reſpect we may have for the geniuſſes of former ages, it does not prevent our often receiving much more pleaſure from thoſe who ſucceeded them. We admire Homer, but we read Taſſo, and find in him a variety of beauties which Homer was a ſtranger to. We admire Sophocles alſo, and yet how many of our good tragic writers have maſter-ſtrokes which, if Sophocles had liv'd after them, he would have been proud to imitate. The Greeks wou'd have learn'd from many of our excellent moderns to unravel their plots more naturally, and to link their ſcenes together in that artful, though imperceptible manner, ſo as never to leave the ſtage empty, and to make the actors go in and out with ſome reaſon for ſo doing.—In this the antients are frequently deficient; and in this Triſſino has unfortunately imitated them.

I am ſatisfy'd, for example, that Sophocles and Euripides wou'd have conſider'd the firſt ſcene of Bajazet as a ſchool of inſtruction, where an old general, by the queſtions which he aſks, informs us, that he is meditating ſome grand enterpriſe.

But what did our brave janiſſaries? they
Pay homage to their ſultan, think'ſt thou, Oſmyn,
It is ſincere, know'ſt thou the hearts of men,
Or can'ſt thou read their ſecret purpoſes?

And a moment after,

Think'ſt

Think'ſt thou with rapture they wou'd follow me,
And hearken to their viſier's voice again?

They wou'd have admir'd the artful method which this conſpirator takes in the diſcovery of his ſchemes, and the account which he gives of his actions; a merit which was unknown to the antient writers. That mixture of the paſſions; that contraſt of oppoſite ſentiments; thoſe animated dialogues between rivals of both ſexes; thoſe quarrels, reciprocal threats and complaints; thoſe intereſting diſputes where every thing is ſaid that ought to be ſaid? with all thoſe various incidents that are ſo well manag'd by modern writers, wou'd have aſtoniſh'd them. They might perhaps have found fault with Hypolitus for being ſo ridiculouſly in love with Aricia, or with his governor for giving him lectures in gallantry, when he ſays,

Where woud'ſt thou thyſelf have been,
If ſtill, like thee, thy mother had refus'd,
With mutual love, to anſwer Theſeus' vows?

Words taken from Paſtor Fido, and much fitter for a ſhepherd than the governor of a prince: but the ſame illuſtrious critics wou'd be ſtruck with admiration at hearing Phædra cry out,

Who wou'd have e'er believ'd it, my Oenone,
I have a rival: yes, Hippolitus,
Whoſe ſavage and unconquerable heart
Was ne'er by pity or affection mov'd,
This tyrant loves, this conqu'ror is ſubdued.

The deſpair of Phædra on the diſcovery of her rival is ſurely infinitely preferable to the tedious and ill-

ill-plac'd ſatire on learned women, which Euripides has put in the mouth of his Hypolitus, who degenerates from the hero into a low comic character. The Greeks wou'd, above all, have been aſtoniſh'd at thoſe ſtrokes of the true ſublime which abound in our modern writers: how wou'd they have been charm'd with this:

What cou'd he do, my lord, when three oppos'd him?
He might have dy'd.

Or the anſwer, ſtill perhaps more beautiful and affecting, which Hermione makes Oreſtes; when, after having inſiſted on his murthering Pyrrhus, ſhe finds herſelf unfortunately obey'd, and cries out,

What had he done, and wherefore did'ſt thou ſlay him?
What right had'ſt thou? who bade thee?

Oreſtes. O ye gods!
Did not Hermione herſelf command me?

Hermione. And ſhou'dſt thou have believ'd a frantic lover?

Indulge me in one more quotation from Cæſar's ſpeech, when they preſent him with the urn incloſing the aſhes of Pompey.

Ye ſacred reliques of a demi-god,
Whoſe noble deeds and ever-honour'd name,
All conqu'ror as I am, I ſcarce can equal.

The Greeks, my lord, have beauties of another kind, but I appeal to you whether they have any that reſemble theſe.

I will

I will even go farther, and venture to aſſert that the antients, who were ſo paſſionately fond of liberty and have ſo often ſaid that there could be no dignity of ſentiment but in a common-wealth, might learn to ſpeak with energy, even on liberty itſelf, from ſome of our tragedies which were written in the boſom of monarchy.

The moderns have moreover ſucceeded oftener than the antients in ſubjects of pure invention. We had many performances of that kind in the time of cardinal Richlieu: it was indeed his peculiar taſte, as well as that of the Spaniards: he was fond of forming plots and characters, and afterwards giving names to the perſons of the drama, as we do in comedy: and in this he frequently amus'd himſelf, as an agreeable relief from the fatigue of public buſineſs. The Vinceſlaus of Rotrou is intirely in this taſte, and all the ſtory fabulous: the author wanted to paint a young man of violent paſſions, with a mixture of good and bad qualities; a father tender and weak: in ſome part of the performance he has ſucceeded. Heraclius and the Cid, taken from the Spaniſh, are both of them invented ſtories: there was indeed an emperor call'd Heraclius, and a Spaniſh captain who had the name of Cid; but ſcarce one of the adventures, which the authors of the tragedies attribute to them, ever really happen'd. In Zara and Alzira (if I may take the liberty to mention them) and which I only do becauſe they are well known, and therefore may ſerve better for examples) every thing is feign'd, even the names. I cannot imagine after this, how father Brumoy cou'd ſay, in his account of the Greek theatre, that tragedy will not admit of feign'd ſubjects, and that this liberty was never taken at Athens. He then ſets himſelf to work to find out a reaſon for

for a thing which never was or cou'd be. 'The 'reaſon, ſays he, I believe may be found, in 'the nature of the human ſoul; nothing can 'move it but probability: now it is not proba- 'ble that facts ſo noble as thoſe which muſt be 'the ſubject of tragedy ſhou'd be abſolutely un- 'known: if therefore the poet invents the whole 'ſubject; even to the very names, the ſpectator 'is ſhock'd; every thing appears incredible to 'him; and the piece can never have its proper 'effect for want of probability.'

Firſt, I ſhall beg leave to obſerve it is falſe, that the Greeks did not admit this ſpecies of tragedy, for Ariſtotle expreſsly mentions Agatho as a writer celebrated for it; and ſecondly, it is equally falſe that theſe ſubjects never ſucceed; experience decides againſt Brumoy in this particular: in the third place, the reaſon which he gives for the poor effect which this kind of tragedy muſt have is no leſs abſurd; he muſt have little knowledge of the human heart, who thinks it cannot be mov'd by fiction: in the fourth place, a ſubject of pure invention, and a true ſubject not known, are abſolutely the ſame thing to the ſpectator; and as our ſtage takes in ſubjects from every age and nation, a ſpectator muſt turn over all the books that ever was written before he can poſſibly know whether what he ſees repreſented be fable or hiſtory; but he will certainly never take that trouble: if the piece is moving and pathetic, he will naturally be affected by it; and when he ſees Polyeucte will never think of ſaying, I do not remember to have heard talk of Paulinus and Severus, ſuch people as theſe ought not to move or affect me!

Brumoy ſhou'd only have obſerv'd that pieces of this kind are more difficult to write than any

others.

others. The character of Phædra was already in Euripides: her declaration of love in Seneca the tragedian: all the ſcene between Auguſtus and Cinna in Seneca the philoſopher: but Severus and Paulinus muſt be the product of the author's own brain. But if father Brumoy is miſtaken with regard to this, and a few other particulars, his book is notwithſtanding, upon the whole, one of the beſt and moſt uſeful performances we have; and though I find fault with his errors, I have at the ſame time the higheſt eſteem for his taſte and erudition.

To return therefore to the ſubject in hand, I once more aſſert, that it wou'd be want of feeling and judgment not to acknowledge, that the French ſtage is infinitely ſuperior to the Greek, in the artful conduct of its plots, in invention, and beauties of diction and ſentiment without number; but, at the ſame time, it wou'd be the heighth of partiality and injuſtice not to confeſs, that love and gallantry have almoſt ruin'd our ſtage, and depriv'd us of almoſt every advantage.

It cannot but be denied, that, amongſt four hundred tragedies which have been exhibited on our ſtage, ſince the time when it began to flouriſh, there are ſcarce more than ten or twelve which are not founded on ſome love intrigue, which is certainly much fitter for comedy: the piece indeed is generally the ſame, the plot form'd by jealouſy and a rupture, and ended in a marriage: one continued ſcene of coquetry, in ſhort a down right comedy, wherein princes act the principal parts, and a little blood is ſhed for form's ſake. The greater part of theſe pieces were ſo very like comedies, that the actors began at laſt to recite them in the ſame tone as they did what we call high or ſerious comedy, which

contributed

contributed in a great manner to degrade tragedy, all the pomp and magnificence of declamation being intirely forgot. The players piqued themſelves on the merit of ſpeaking verſe exactly in the ſame manner as proſe, without conſidering that a language above the ordinary language ought to be repeated in * tone above the vulgar and familiar tone: and if ſome actors had not happily corrected this fault, our tragedy wou'd ſoon have dwindled into a heap of diſcourſes on love and gallantry, repeated without force or ſpirit, in a cold and lifeleſs manner: as a proof of this, it is not long ſince, amongſt every company of players, the principal parts in tragedy were known only by the names of the gentleman lover, and the lady lover. If a ſtranger had aſk'd at Athens which was their beſt actor of the lover in Iphigenia, Hecuba, the Heraclides, Oedipus, or Electra, they wou'd not even have underſtood what he meant by ſuch a queſtion.

The French ſtage has indeed of late years endeavour'd to waſh off this ſtain by ſome tragedies wherein love is repreſented as a furious and terrible paſſion, worthy of the theatre; and by ſome others, where even the name of love is not ſo much as mention'd: never did love cauſe ſo many tears to flow as nature hath: the heart is generally but ſlightly touch'd by the complaints of a lover, but it is deeply affected by the melancholy ſituation of a mother on the point of loſing her

* Notwithſtanding what Mr. Voltaire has here advanc'd in favour of his tragedy tone, it is extremely diſguſtful to an Engliſh ear; nor can indeed any good reaſon be given, why heroes and heroines ſhou'd not talk like other people: but mouthing, ranting, and whining, were for a long time as faſhionable on our own, as they can poſſibly be on the French ſtage, till Nature and Garrick united to convince us of our error, and lead us into a better method.

her ſon: certainly it was only in compliment to his friend that Deſpreaux ſaid,

‖ Love finely painted by the poet's art,
Opens the ſureſt paſſage to the heart.

The path of nature is a thouſand times more ſure, as well as more noble. The fineſt ſtrokes in Iphigenia are thoſe where Clytemnæſtra defends her daughter, and not thoſe where Achilles defends his miſtreſs.

In Semiramis, the deſign was to have exhibited a ſpectacle even more affecting than that in Merope, with all the pomp of the antient Greek theatre. It wou'd be a melancholy conſideration to reflect, that after our great maſters had ſurpaſs'd the antients in almoſt every part of tragedy, we ſhou'd fall ſhort of them in our repreſentations of it; but on our ſtage, one of the greateſt obſtacles to any grand and pathetic action is, the number of ſpectators, that croud in with the actors; an indecency which caus'd remarkable confuſion on the firſt night of Semiramis. The firſt actreſs from London was preſent at the repreſentation, and was aſtoniſh'd: ſhe cou'd not conceive how any people in the world cou'd be ſuch enemies to their own pleaſures, as to ſpoil a ſight which they might have enjoy'd. This abuſe was corrected the enſuing nights, during the run of Semiramis, and might eaſily be intirely put a ſtop to. We may think ſlightly of it if we pleaſe, but an inconvenience like this is ſufficient to deprive us of a number of excellent productions, which I make no doubt wou'd have appear'd if we

‖ ——De l' amour la ſenſible punture
Eſt pour aller au cæ'ur la route la plus ſure.
See Boileau's Art Poetique.

we had kept our ſtage free, proper for action, and ſuch as it is in all other parts of Europe.

But this is moſt certainly not the only evil which calls for a remedy amongſt us: I cannot ſufficiently expreſs my aſtoniſhment and concern at the little care which we take in France to make our theatres worthy of the excellent performances repreſented in them, and of the nation which encourages them: ſurely Cinna and Athaliah deſerve a better place than a tennis-court, with a few vile decorations at top, in a bad taſte, and where the ſpectators are placed without any order or decorum; ſome upon the ſtage itſelf, others below in what they call the parterre, where they are crouded and preſs'd together in the moſt indecent manner, throwing themſelves ſometimes one upon another, as if there was an inſurrection of the populace: whilſt as far north as we can well travel, our dramatic works are exhibited in theatres a thouſand times more magnificent, and with much more decency and decorum.

But above all, how far do we fall ſhort of that good ſenſe and fine taſte, with regard to every thing of this kind, with reigns throughout Italy! It reflects ſhame and diſgrace upon us to ſuffer theſe reliques of barbariſm to remain in a city ſo large, ſo well-peopled, ſo rich, and ſo poliſh'd as Paris is; whilſt, at the ſame time, a tenth part of what we expend every day in trifles, as coſtly as they are uſeleſs, might enable us to raiſe public monuments of every kind that wou'd render it as magnificent as it is populous, and one day perhaps place it on a level with Rome itſelf which is our model in every thing. This was one of the great deſigns of the immortal Colbert. I flatter myſelf you will pardon this digreſſion,

digreſſion, and attribute it to the love I bear to the arts and to my country. I am not without hopes, that one day or other our magiſtrates may be inſpir'd with the noble ambition of imitating the magiſtrates of Athens, Rome, and modern Italy.

A theatre, built according to the beſt antient rules, ſhou'd be very extenſive; ſhou'd repreſent a part of ſome public place, the periſtyle of a palace, or the entrance to a temple; and ſhou'd be ſo contriv'd, that one perſon of the drama, though ſeen by the ſpectators, might not be ſeen by the other actors, if at any time there ſhou'd be an occaſion for concealing him: it ſhou'd be made ſo as to deceive the eye, which is the firſt thing to be conſider'd: it ſhou'd be capable of exhibiting the greateſt pomp and ſplendor imaginable: every ſpectator ſhou'd ſee and hear equally well in whatever part he was ſeated. But how can this be ever expected upon a narrow ſtage, in the midſt of a croud of young fellows, who will ſcarce leave the actors ten foot ſpace? Hence it ariſes, that moſt of our plays are nothing but long diſcourſes; all theatrical action is loſt, or if practis'd, appears ridiculous. This abuſe remains, like many others, becauſe it is eſtabliſh'd; and for the ſame reaſon that we do not pull our houſes down, though we know them to be badly built. A public nuſance is ſeldom remov'd but at the laſt extremity. When I ſpeak of theatrical action, I mean dreſs, ceremony, aſſemblies of the people, incidents and events neceſſary to the piece; and not any of thoſe ſhews frequently exhibited, rather childiſh than grand, the reſources of art to ſupply the deficiency of the poet, and amuſe the eye when they are incapable of charming the ear, or moving

ing the heart. I ſaw a play at London, wherein was repreſented the coronation of a king of England with all the exactneſs imaginable: a knight, arm'd at all points, enter'd on horſeback upon the ſtage. I have often heard people telling ſtrangers, O! the charming opera that we have been at, we ſaw above two hundred guards upon the full gallop. Theſe gentlemen had no idea, that four good verſes in a piece were better than a troop of horſe. At Paris we have a company of ſtrollers, who ſeldom having any thing of real merit to repreſent, entertain us with fire-works: but, many years ago, Horace, who had perhaps more taſte than any of the antients, finely ridiculed all thoſe fooleries that bewitch'd the vulgar.

Eſſeda feſtinant, pilenta, petorrita, naves;
Captivum portatur ebur, captiva Corinthus.
Si foret in terris, rideret Democritus;
Spectaret populum ludis attentius ipſis.

PART the THIRD.

On SEMIRAMIS.

You will perceive, my lord, from the foregoing obſervations, that it was a pretty bold undertaking to repreſent Semiramis aſſembling the ſeveral orders of the ſtate, and declaring to them her intended marriage; the ghoſt of Ninus, coming out of the tomb to prevent the inceſt, and revenge his own death; Semiramis entering the mauſolæum, and returning from it, wounded by her ſon, and juſt expiring. There was reaſon to fear that a ſpectacle of this kind wou'd be diſagreeable to many; and in effect ſo it was; for

three parts of thoſe who frequent the theatre, and were uſed to amorous elegies, combined together againſt this new ſpecies of tragedy. We are told that formerly, in a city of antient Greece, rewards were propoſed for thoſe who cou'd invent any new pleaſure: the direct contrary happen'd with regard to Semiramis. Whatever efforts were made, notwithſtanding, to ſuppreſs this ſpecies of the drama, which has in it all the terror of true tragedy, they cou'd not ſucceed: it was echo'd on every ſide, both in writing and converſation, that apparitions were childiſh things to be produced before a refined and ſenſible people. But why ſo? did not all antiquity believe in them, and ſhall we not conform to antiquity! Has not our religion itſelf given a ſanction to theſe extraordinary ſtrokes of providence? and is it notwithſtanding ridiculous and abſurd to repeat them?

The Roman philoſophers had no faith in ghoſts in the time of the emperors, and yet young Pompey raiſes one in the Pharſalia. The Engliſh have certainly no more belief in ſpirits than the Romans had, and yet they ſee every day with pleaſure, in the tragedy of Hamlet, the ghoſt of a king, who appears nearly the ſame as the apparation of Ninus did at Paris. I am at the ſame time far from juſtifying the tragedy of Hamlet in every reſpect; it is a groſs and barbarous piece, and wou'd never be borne by the loweſt of the rabble in France or Italy. Hamlet runs mad in the ſecond act, and his miſtreſs in the third; the prince † kills the father of his miſtreſs and

† The original is 'croyant tuer un rat,' and a little before we are told that Hamlet 'devient fou au ſecond acte' runs mad in the ſecond act. Mr. Volaire, as is evident from the whole which he has here advanc'd, ſeems, at the time when he wrote this, to

and fancies he is killing a rat; and the heroine of the play throws herſelf into the river. They dig her grave upon the ſtage, and the grave-diggers, holding the dead-men's ſculls in their hands, talk nonſenſe worthy of them. Hamlet anſwers their abominable ſtuff by ſome whimſies not leſs diſguſtful: during this time one of the actors makes the conqueſt of Pologne. Hamlet, his mother, and father-in-law, drink together upon the ſtage: they ſing at table, quarrel, beat and kill one another: one wou'd think the whole piece was the product of the imagination of a drunken ſavage: and yet, amongſt all theſe groſs irregularities, which make the Engliſh theatre even at this day ſo abſurd and barbarous, we find in Hamlet, which is ſtill more ſtrange and unaccountable, ſome ſublime ſtrokes worthy of the greateſt genius. It ſeems as if nature took pleaſure to unite in the head of Shakeſpear all that we can imagine great and forcible, together with all that the groſſeſt dullneſs cou'd produce of every thing that is moſt low and deteſtable.

It muſt be acknowledg'd, that, amongſt the beauties that ſhine forth in the midſt of all theſe horrid extravagancies, the ghoſt of Hamlet's father is one of the moſt ſtriking: it has always a ſtrong effect on the Engliſh, I mean on thoſe who are the beſt judges, and are moſt hurt by the irregularity of their old theatre. This ghoſt inſpires more terror, even in the reading, than the apparition of Darius in the Perſians of

have been very little acquainted with Hamlet, who, we all know, did neither run mad, nor take Polonius for a rat: but, as Shakeſpear takes care to inform us, when the wind ſat fair, knew a hawk from a hernſhaw. But Mr. V. like other great geniuſſes is ſometimes a little too apt to take things upon truſt, and judge haſtily; he wou'd not otherwiſe ſo raſhly, and ſo frequently, condemn the inimitable Shakeſpear.

Æſchylus: and why does it? becauſe Darius, in Æſchylus, only appears to foretel the misfortunes of his family; whereas, in Shakeſpear, the ghoſt of Hamlet appears to demand vengeance, and to reveal ſecret crimes. It is neither uſeleſs, nor brought in by force, but ſerves to convince mankind, that there is an inviſible power, the maſter of nature. All men have a ſenſe of juſtice imprinted on their hearts, and naturally wiſh that heaven wou'd intereſt itſelf in the cauſe of innocence: in every age therefore, and in every nation, they will behold with pleaſure, the ſupreme being engag'd in the puniſhment of crimes which cou'd not come within the reach of human laws: this is a conſolation to the weak, and a reſtraint on the inſolence and obſtinacy of the powerful.

———Heaven
Will oft ſuſpend its own eternal laws
When juſtice calls, reverſing death's decree,
Thus to chaſtiſe the ſov'reigns of the earth,
And terrify mankind———

Thus Semiramis ſpeaks to the high prieſt of Babylon, and thus the ſucceſſor of Samuel might have ſpoke to Saul, when the ghoſt of Samuel came to tell him of his condemnation.

I will go ſtill further, and venture to affirm, when an extraordinary circumſtance of this kind is mention'd in the beginning of a tragedy, when it is properly prepar'd, when things are ſo ſituated as to render it neceſſary, and even look'd for and deſir'd by the ſpectators; it ought then to be conſider'd as perfectly natural: it is at the ſame time ſufficiently obvious, that theſe bold ſtrokes are not to be too often repeated.

Nec

Nec Deus interſit niſi dignus vindice nodus.

I moſt certainly wou'd not, in imitation of Euripides, make Diana deſcend at the end of the tragedy of Phædra, nor Minerva in the Iphigenia in Tauris; nor wou'd I, as Shakeſpear has done, bring in the evil genius of Brutus appearing to him in his tent: I wou'd never make uſe of ſuch reſources but when they cou'd raiſe terror, and at the ſame time carry on the buſineſs of the play. I cou'd wiſh, moreover, that the intervention of theſe ſupernatural beings ſhou'd not appear abſolutely neceſſary: with regard to this I muſt explain myſelf: if the plot of a tragedy is ſo intricate and perplex'd, that we can no way diſentangle ourſelves but by the help of a prodigy, the ſpectator perceives the diſtreſs the poet is in, and conſequently the weakneſs of his reſource: he only ſees a writer who has made a falſe ſtep, and is put to his ſhifts to recover himſelf: the more aſtoniſhing it is, the more the deſign appears.

Quodcunque oſtendis mihi ſic, incredulus odi.

But I will ſuppoſe the author of a tragedy had it principally in view to inform mankind, that God ſometimes puniſhes extraordinary crimes by extraordinary means; I will ſuppoſe that his piece was ſo artfully conducted, that the ſpectator every moment expected the ghoſt of an aſſaſſinated king demanding vengeance, though the appearance was by no means neceſſary to the clearing up an embarraſs'd plot. I ſay, that thus circumſtanced, a prodigy of this kind, ſuppoſing it to be well manag'd, wou'd have a great effect, in any language, age, or country whatever.

Such is, pretty nearly, the conduct of Semiramis, (thoſe beauties excepted with which it was not in my power to adorn it) from the very firſt ſcene we perceive that every thing muſt be done by the intervention of divine power; and, from act to act, every thing turns on this particular notion. 'Tis an avenging God who inſpires Semiramis with that remorſe which ſhe never wou'd have felt in her proſperity, if the voice of Ninus himſelf had not terrify'd her in the midſt of all her triumphs: the ſame God, by that remorſe which he had inſpir'd, prepares the way for her puniſhment; and hence ariſes the whole inſtructive moral of the piece. The deſign of the antient tragedies was generally to eſtabliſh ſome great maxim or ſublime truth: thus Sophocles finiſhes his Oedipus with obſerving, that no man can be called happy before his death; and in Semiramis the moral is contain'd in theſe verſes:

There are crimes
Offended heaven never will forgive.

A maxim much more important than that of Sophocles: but what inſtruction, the reader perhaps may object, can ariſe to the generality of mankind from a crime ſo uncommon, and a puniſhment ſtill more extraordinary? I acknowledge, that the cataſtrophe of Semiramis cannot often occur, but what happens every day may be met with in the laſt verſes of this piece;

——— remember that our ſecret crimes
Are witneſs'd by the gods———

There are few families on earth where this may not be ſometimes apply'd: with regard to particulars

culars of this kind, tragical ſubjects, that are ever ſo much above the fortunes of common people, have a real reſpect to, and connection with, the manners of all mankind.

I might indeed apply to Semiramis the moral, with which Euripides finiſhes his Alceſtes, a piece wherein the marvellous has a much greater ſhare than in mine, viz. that the gods employ the moſt wonderful and aſtoniſhing means in the execution of their divine decrees, and that the great events which they bring about, ſurpaſs the underſtandings of men.

Becauſe, my lord, and only becauſe this little work of mine breaths the pureſt and moſt ſevere morality, I have taken the liberty to addreſs it to your lordſhip. True tragedy is the ſchool of virtue, and the only difference between a refined theatre, and books of morality is, that the inſtruction of the former is all in action, that it is more intereſting, and heighthen'd by the charms of an art invented to make earth and heaven happy, and which was therefore truly call'd, the language of the gods. You, my lord, who poſſeſs this talent with ſo many others, will, I doubt not, pardon me this long detail, on a ſubject which perhaps has never yet been thoroughly underſtood; but which wou'd no longer be obſcure, if your lordſhip wou'd deign to communicate to me thoſe lights into antiquity, of which you have ſo perfect a knowledge.

SEMIRAMIS.

A

TRAGEDY.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

SEMIRAMIS.
ARSACES, or NINIAS.
AZEMA, a Princeſs of the Family of Belus.
ASSUR, a Prince of the Family of Belus.
OROES, High-Prieſt.
OTANES, a Favourite of Semiramis.
MITRANES, Friend of Arſaces.
CEDAR, Friend of Aſſur.

Guards, Magi, Slaves, Attendants.

SEMIRAMIS.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I.

The ſcene repreſents a large periſtyle, at the bottom of which is the palace of Semiramis. Gardens with fine hanging terraſſes, rais'd above the palace: on the right hand the temple of the magi, and on the left a mauſolæum adorn'd with obeliſks.

SCENE I.

ARSACES, MITRANES.

Two ſlaves at a diſtance carrying a coffer.

Arſ. ONCE more, Mitranes, thou behold'ſt thy friend,
Who, in obedience to the royal mandate
In ſecret ſent, reviſits Babylon,

The

The ſeat of empire: how Semiramis
Imprints the image of her own great ſoul
On ev'ry object! theſe ſtupendous piles,
Theſe deep encloſures, where Euphrates pours
His tributary waves; the temple's pride,
The hanging gardens, and the ſplendid tomb
Of Ninus, wond'rous monuments of art!
And only leſs to be admir'd than her
Who rais'd them! here, in all her ſplendid pomp,
More honour'd than the monarchs of the Eaſt,
Arſaces ſhall behold this glorious queen.

Mit. O my Arſaces, credit not the voice
Of Fame, ſhe is deceitful oft, and vain;
Perhaps hereafter thou may'ſt weep with me,
And admiration on a nearer view
May turn to pity.

Arſ. Wherefore?

Mit. Sunk in grief,
Semiramis hath ſpread o'er ev'ry heart
The ſorrows which ſhe feels; ſometimes ſhe raves,
Filling the air with her diſtreſsful cries,
As if ſome vengeful God purſued her; ſits
Silent and ſad within theſe lonely vaults,
Sacred to night, to ſorrow, and to death,
Which mortals dare not enter; where the aſhes
Of Ninus, our late honour'd ſov'reign, lie:
There will ſhe oft fall on her knees and weep:
With ſlow and fearful ſteps ſhe glides along,
And beats her breaſt beſprinkled with her tears:
Oft as ſhe treads her ſolitary round,
Will ſhe repeat the names of ſon and huſband,
And call on heav'n, which in its anger ſeems
To thwart her in the zenith of her glory.

Arſ. Whence can her ſorrows flow?

Mit. Th' effect is dreadful;
The cauſe unknown.

Arſ. How long hath ſhe been thus
Oppreſs'd, Mitranes?

Mit. From the very time
When firſt her orders came to bring Arſaces.

Arſ. Me, ſaid'ſt thou?

Mit.

Mit. You, my lord: when Babylon
Rejoicing met to celebrate thy conqueſts,
And ſaw the banners thy victorious arm
Had wreſted from our vanquiſh'd foes; when firſt
Euphrates brought to our delighted ſhore
The lovely Azema, from Belus ſprung,
Whom thou had'ſt ſav'd from Scythian raviſhers,
Ev'n in that hour of triumph and ſucceſs,
Ev'n in the boſom of proſperity,
The heart of majeſty was pierc'd with grief,
And the throne loſt its luſtre.

Arſ. Azema
Was not to blame; ſhe cou'd not be the cauſe
Of ſorrow or diſtreſs; one look from her
Wou'd ſooth the wrath of gods: but ſay, my friend,
Semiramis is ſtill a ſov'reign here,
Her heart is not for ever ſunk in grief?

Mit. No: when her noble mind ſhakes off the burthen,
Reſumes its ſtrength, and ſhines in native luſtre,
Then we behold in her exalted ſoul
Pow'rs that excel whatever flatt'ry's ſelf
Hath e'er beſtow'd on kings; but when ſhe ſinks
Beneath this dreadful malady, looſe flow
The reins of empire, dropping from her hand;
Then the proud Satrap, fiery Aſſur, guides
The helm, and makes the nations groan beneath him:
The fatal ſecret never yet hath reach'd
The walls of Babylon: abroad we ſtill
Are envy'd, but, alas! we mourn at home.

Arſ. What leſſon of inſtruction to weak mortals,
When happineſs is mingled thus with woe!
I too am wretched, thus depriv'd of him
Whoſe piercing wiſdom beſt cou'd give me council,
And lead me through the mazes of a court.
O I have cauſe to weep: without a father,
Left as I am to all the dang'rous paſſions
Of heedleſs youth, without a friendly guide,
What rocks encompaſs, and what ſhoals affright me!

Mit. I weep with thee the loſs of him we lov'd,
The good old man; Phraates was my friend;

Ninus

Ninus eſteem'd and gave to him the care
Of Ninias his dear ſon, our country's hope;
But O! one fatal day deſtroy'd them both,
Father and ſon: to voluntary exile
Devoted, long he liv'd: his baniſhment
Was fortunate to thee, and made thee great:
Cloſe by his ſide, in honour's glorious field,
Arſaces fought, and conquer'd for his country:
Now, rank'd with princes, thy exalted virtue
Claims its reward by merit all thy own.

Arſ. I know not what may be my portion here;
Perhaps, diſtinguiſh'd on Arbazan's plains
With fair ſucceſs, my name is not unknown
On Oxus' banks to great Semiramis:
When vanquiſh'd nations paid the homage due,
From her triumphant carr ſhe drop'd a ray
Of her own glory on Arſaces' head:
But oft the ſoldier, honour'd in the field,
In courts neglected lies, and is forgotten.
My father told me in his dying hour
The fortune of Arſaces here depended
Upon the common cauſe; then gave to me
Theſe precious relics, which from ev'ry eye
He had preſerv'd; I muſt deliver them
To the high-prieſt, for he alone can judge,
And know their value: I muſt talk with him
In ſecret, touching my own fate, for he
Can beſt conduct me to Semiramis.

Mit. He ſeldom ſees the queen: in ſolitude
Obſcure he lives: his holy miniſtry
Engroſſes all his care; without ambition,
Fearleſs, and void of art: is always ſeen,
Within the temple, never at the court:
Never affects the pride of rank and title,
Nor his tiara near the diadem
Immodeſt wears: the leſs he ſeeks for greatneſs
The more is he admir'd, the more rever'd:
I have acceſs to ev'ry avenue
Of his retirement in this ſacred place,
And can this moment talk to him in ſecret;
Ere day's too far advanc'd I'll bring him hither.

SCENE

SCENE II.

ARSACES alone.

Immortal gods! for what am I reſerv'd?
Make known your will: why did my dying father
Thus ſend me to the ſanctuary, me
A ſoldier, bred amidſt the din of arms?
A lover too? How can Arſaces ſerve
The gods of the Chaldeans?—Ha! what voice
From yonder tomb in plantive accents ſtrikes
My frighted ear, and makes my hair to ſtand
An end with horror! Near this place I've heard
The ſpirit of Ninus dwells—again it ſhrieks—
It ſhocks my ſoul—Ye dark and dreary caves,
And thou, the ſhade of my illuſtrious maſter,
Thou voice of heav'n, what woud'ſt thou with Arſaces?

SCENE III.

ARSACES, OROES *the high-prieſt, the magi attending him,* MITRANES.

Mit. He's here, my lord, and waits to give you up
Thoſe precious relics. [*Speaking to* Oroes.
Arſ. Moſt reverend father,
Permit a ſoldier to approach your preſence,
Pleas'd to fulfil a father's laſt command,
One whom you deign'd to love; thus at your feet,
Obedient to his will, I here reſign them.
Oro. Welcome! thou brave and nobſe youth! that God
Who governs all, and not a father's will,
Guided thee here: Phraates was my friend;

Dear

Dear is his mem'ry to me; thou ſhalt know
Perhaps hereafter how I love his ſon:
Where are the gifts he ſent me?
Arſ. Here, my lord.
[*The ſlaves deliver the coffer to two of the magi, who place it on an altar.*
Oro. Ye ſacred relicks! do theſe eyes at length
[*Opening the coffer, bowing reverentially to it, and ſeeming greatly affected.*
Behold you! O I weep for joy to preſs
Theſe monuments of woe, whilſt tears recal
My ſolemn oath: Mitranes, let no ear
Profane diſturb our holy myſtery:
We wou'd be private. [*The magi retire.*
Mark this ſeal, Arſaces:
'Tis that which to the laws of Ninus gave
Their public force, and kept the world in awe:
The letter too, which with his dying hand
He wrote: Arſaces, view the wreath that crown'd
His royal brows, and his victorious ſword:
The vanquiſh'd Medes and Perſians felt its pow'r;
It comes at laſt to vindicate its maſter,
And to revenge him: uſeleſs inſtrument
Againſt baſe treach'ry, and deſtructive poiſon,
Whoſe mortal—
Arſ. Heaven! what ſayſt thou?
Oro. The dread ſecret
Hath long been hid in darkneſs from the eyes
Of men within this ſepulchre; the ſhade
Of Ninus, and offended heav'n, long time
Have rais'd their voice in vain, and call'd for vengeance.
Arſ. It muſt be as thou ſay'ſt: for know, but now,
Ev'n on this ſpot, I heard moſt dreadful groans.
Oro. It was the voice of Ninus.
Arſ. Twice the noiſe
Affrighted me.
Oro. 'Twas he: he calls for vengeance.
Arſ. He has a right to aſk it: but on whom?
Oro. On the vile murth'rers, whoſe deteſted hands
Had of the beſt of ſov'reigns rob'd mankind:
No tracks are left behind of the baſe treaſon,

But

But all with him lies bury'd in the tomb:
With eaſe might they deceive the ſons of men,
But not th' all-ſeeing eye of watchful heav'n,
Which pierces the deep night of human falſehood.
Arſ. O! wou'd to heav'n this feeble hand had pow'r
To puniſh crimes like theſe! I know not wherefore,
But when I caſt my eyes towards yon tomb,
New horrors riſe: O might I conſult
That venerable ſhade, th' inhabitant
Of thoſe dark manſions?
Oro. No; it is forbidden:
An oracle ſevere long ſince denounc'd
The wrath of heav'n againſt whoe'er ſhou'd preſs
Into this vale of tears, inhabited
By death and the avenging gods: await
With me, Arſaces, for the day of juſtice:
Soon will it come, and all ſhall be accompliſh'd:
I can no more: ſequeſter'd from the world,
I pray in ſecret to offended heav'n,
Which, as it wills, commiſſions me to ſpeak,
Or cloſe my lips in ſilence: I have ſaid
All that I dare, and all I ought: be careful
Leſt in theſe walls a word, or look, or geſture,
Betray the ſecret which the god by me
Hath truſted with thee; for on that depends
His glory, Aſia's welfare, and thy life.
Approach, ye magi, hide theſe ſacred relics
Beneath the altar.
[*The great gate of the palace opens,* Aſſur *appears at a diſtance, ſurrounded with attendants and guards on every ſide.*
Ha! the palace opens:
The courtiers crouding to the queen: behold
The haughty Aſſur with his ſervile throng
Of flatt'rers round him! O almighty pow'r!
On whom doſt thou beſtow thy bounties here?
O monſter!
Arſ. Ha! what mean'ſt thou?
Oro. Fare thee well:
When night ſhall caſt her ſable mantle o'er
Theſe guilty walls, I'll have more converſe with thee,

Before

Before the gods: revere them my Arſaces,
For know, brave youth, their eyes are fix'd on thee.

SCENE IV.

ARSACES, MITRANES, in the front of the ſtage.

ASSUR, CEDAR, with attendants, on one ſide.

Arſ. His words are dreadful; they affright my ſoul:
What horrid crimes! and what a court is here!
How little known! my royal maſter poiſon'd,
And Aſſur, but too well I ſee, ſuſpected!
Mit. Aſſur is ſprung of royal race, and claims
The def'rence due to his authority:
He is the fav'rite of Semiramis,
And thou, without a bluſh, may'ſt pay him homage.
Arſ. Homage to him!
Aſſ. Ha! do my eyes deceive me, [*To Cedar.*
Or is Arſaces here without my order?
Amazing inſolence!
Arſ. What haughtineſs!
Aſſ. Come hither, youth: what new engagements here [*advancing*
Have brought you from the camp?
Arſ. My duty, Sir,
And the queen's orders.
Aſſ. Did the queen ſend for you?
Arſ. She did.
Aſſ. But, know you not, with her commands
You ſhou'd have aſk'd for mine?
Arſ. I know not that,
And ſhou'd have thought the honour of her crown
Debas'd by ſuch a mean ſubmiſſion to thee:
My lord, you muſt forgive a ſoldier's roughneſs,
We are bad courtiers: bred up in the plains
Of Arbazan and Scythia, I have ſerv'd
Your court, but am not much acquainted with it.

Aſſ.

Aſſ. Age, time, and place, perhaps may teach you, Sir.
What wou'd you with the queen? for know, young man,
Aſſur alone can lead you to her preſence.
Arſ. I come to aſk my valour's beſt reward,
The honour ſtill to ſerve her.
Aſſ. Thou want'ſt more,
Preſumptuous boy! I know thy bold pretences
To Azema, but that thou woud'ſt conceal.
Arſ. Yes: I adore that lovely maid: her heart
Wou'd I prefer to empire: my reſpect,
My tend'reſt love—
Aſſ. No more: thou know'ſt not whom
Thou art inſulting thus: what! join the race
Of a Sarmatian to the demi-gods
Of Tigris and Euphrates! mark me well:
In pity to thy youth I would adviſe thee
Ne'er, on thy peril, to Semiramis
Impart thy inſolent requeſt; for know,
Raſh boy, if thou ſhou'd'ſt dare to violate
The rights of Aſſur, 'twill not paſs unpuniſh'd.
Arſ. I'll go this inſtant: thou haſt giv'n me courage:
Thus threat'nings always terrify Arſaces:
Thou haſt no right, whate'er thy pow'r may be,
T'affront a ſoldier who has ſerv'd his queen,
The ſtate, and thee: perhaps my warmth offends;
But thou art raſher than myſelf, to think
That I wou'd bend beneath thy ſervile yoke,
Or tremble at thy pow'r.
Aſſ. I'll teach thee what a ſubject may expect
For inſolence like this.
Arſ. We both may learn it.

SCENE

SCENE V.

SEMIRAMIS at the further end of the ſtage, leaning on her women.

OTANES, ASSUR, ARSACES, MITRANES, in the front advancing.

Ota. My lord, the queen at preſent wou'd be private:
You muſt retire, and give her ſorrows way:
Withdraw, ye gods, the hand of vengeance from her!
Arſ. How I lament her fate!
Aſſ. Let us begone, [*To one of his attendants.*
And ſtudy how we beſt may turn her griefs
To our advantage.
[Semiramis *comes forward, and is join'd by* Otanes.
Ota. * My royal miſtreſs, be yourſelf again,
And wake once more to joy and happineſs.
Sem. O death! when wilt thou come with friendly ſhade
To cloſe theſe eyes that hate the light of day?
Be ſhut, ye caves; horrible phantom, hence!
Strike if thou wilt, but threaten me no more.
Otanes, is Arſaces come?
Ota. Ere morn
Roſe on the temple, madam, he was there.
Sem. That dreadful voice, from heav'n or hell I know not,
Which in the dead of night ſo ſhakes my ſoul,
Told me, my ſorrows, when Arſaces came,
Wou'd ſoon be o'er.
Ota. Rely then on the gods,
And let the chearful ray of hope diſpel
This melancholy.

Sem.

* The beginning of this ſcene ſeems aukwardly conducted. Aſſur, Arſaces, and Mitranes, come in only to go out again: it wou'd, I think, have commenc'd much more properly with this ſpeech of Otanes.

Sem. Is Arſaces here?
Methinks, when I but hear his name, my ſoul
Is leſs diſturb'd, and guilt ſits lighter on me!
Ota. O! quit, for ever quit the ſad remembrance:
Let the bright days of great Semiramis,
Replete with glory, blot one moment out
That broke the chain of thy ill-fated nuptials:
Had Ninus driv'n thee from his throne and bed,
All Babylon with thee had been deſtroy'd;
But happily for us, and for mankind,
That wanted ſuch diſtinguiſh'd virtues, you
Prevented him; and fifteen years of toil,
Spent in the ſervice of thy country, lands
Deſert and waſte made fertile by thy care,
The ſavage tamed, and yielding to the laws,
The uſeful arts, obedient to thy voice,
Upriſing ſtill, the glorious monuments
Of wealth and pow'r, the wonder of mankind,
And the loud plaudit of a grateful people,
All plead thy cauſe before the throne of heav'n;
But if impartial juſtice hold the ſcale,
If vengeance is requir'd for Ninus' death,
Why thus ſhou'd Aſſur brave the angry gods,
And live in peace? He was more guilty far
Than thou wert, yet the ruthleſs hand that pour'd
The fatal draught ne'er ſhakes with fear: he feels
No ſting of conſcience, no remorſe affrights him.
Sem. Our duties diff'rent, diff'rent is our fate:
Where ties are ſacred, crimes are heavier far:
I was his wife, Otanes, and I ſtand
Without excuſe; my conſcience is my judge
And my accuſer: but I hoped the gods,
Offended at my crimes, had puniſh'd me
Enough, when they depriv'd me of my child;
Hoped my ſucceſsful toils, that made the earth
Reſpect my name, had ſooth'd the wrath of heav'n:
But months on months have paſs'd in agony
Since this dire ſpectre hath appall'd my ſoul:
My eyes for ever ſee him, and my ears
Still hear his cries: I get me to the tomb,

But dare not enter: trembling I revere
His aſhes, and invoke his honour'd ſhade,
Which only anſwers me in diſmal groans.
Some dread event is nigh: perhaps the time
Is come to expiate the offence.

Ota. But think'ſt thou
The ſpirit of thy lord hath left indeed
The manſions of the dead, and ſtalks abroad?
Oftimes the ſoul, by pow'rful fancy led,
Starts at a phantom of its own creation;
Still it beholds the objects it has made,
And every thing we fear is preſent to us.

Sem. O no! it was not the wild dream of fancy
By ſlumber wrought, I ſaw him but too well:
The ſtranger ſleep had long withheld from me
His ſweet deluſions; watchful as I ſtood,
And mus'd on my unhappy fate, a voice
Cloſe to my bed, methought, cry'd out, Arſaces!
The name reviv'd me: well thou know'ſt, long time
Aſſur has pierc'd this heart with deadly grief:
I ſhudder at his preſence, and the bluſhes
That ſhew my guilt increaſe my puniſhment,
Hate the reproachful witneſs of my ſhame,
And wiſh I cou'd—but wherefore ſhou'd I add
To crimes like mine freſh guilt? I ſought Arſaces
To puniſh Aſſur, and the thought of him
Awhile reliev'd me! but in the ſweet moment
Of conſolation, ſudden ſtood before me
That miniſter of death, all bath'd in blood,
And in his hand a falchion: ſtill I ſee,
Still hear him: comes he to defend, or puniſh?
'Twas at that very hour Arſaces came.
This day was fix'd by heav'n to end my ſorrows;
But peace is yet a ſtranger to my ſoul,
And hope is loſt in horror and deſpair:
The load of life is grown too heavy for me,
My throne is hateful, and my glories paſt
But add freſh weight to my calamities.
Long time I've hid my ſorrows from the world
And bluſh'd in ſecret, fearful to conſult
That rev'rend ſage whom Babylon adores:

I wou'd

I wou'd not thus degrade the majeſty
Of ſov'reign pow'r, or let Semiramis
Betray her fears before a mortal's eye,
But I have ſent to Lybia's ſands in ſecret
There to conſult the oracle of Jove:
As if, remov'd from man, the god of truth
Had hid in deſart plains his will divine.
Alas! Otanes, that dread pow'r which dwells
Within theſe lonely walls, hath long receiv'd
My fears and adorations; at his altars
My gifts were offer'd, and my incenſe roſe;
But gifts and incenſe never can atone
For crimes like mine: to-day I ſhall receive
Anſwers from Memphis.

SCENE VI.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES, MITRANES.

Mit. An Egyptian prieſt
Is at the palace gate, and begs admitance.
Sem. Then will my woes be ended, or complete.
Let us be gone, and hide from Babylon
Her queen's diſgraceful ſorrows: let Arſaces
Be ſent to me: ſoon may his preſence calm
This ſtorm of grief, and ſooth my troubled ſoul!

END of the FIRST ACT.

ACT

ACT II. SCENE I.

ARSACES, AZEMA.

Aze. TO thee, Arſaces, this great empire owes
Its luſtre, I my liberty and life.
When vanquiſh'd Scythia, thirſting for revenge,
From its wild deſart ruſh'd indignant forth,
And bore down all before it; when my father,
Oppreſs'd by numbers, fell, and left me there
A hapleſs ſlave; then, arm'd with thunder, thou,
Piercing their dark retreats, didſt break my chains,
And give me ample vengeance on my foes.
Thou wert my great deliverer, Arſaces,
And in return I give thee all my heart;
I will be thine, and only thine; but O!
Our fatal paſſion will deſtroy us both:
Thy gen'rous heart, too open and ſincere,
Believ'd that gallant deeds, and fair renown
In arms, wou'd gain thee honours in a court:
And, fearleſs of ſucceſs, thou bring'ſt with thee
A hero's fierceneſs and a lover's heart.
Aſſur's incens'd: alas! thou doſt not know him:
He is too pow'rful for us; he rules all
At Babylon; and much, I fear, abuſes
His fatal influence o'er Semiramis:
He is thy great inexorable—rival.
Arſ. Ha! does he love thee?
Aze. No: that ſavage mind,
Subtle and dark, a foe to ev'ry virtue,
Inſenſible to love and ev'ry charm
But thoſe ambition boaſts, cou'd never feel
A real paſſion for me: but he knows
That Azema's deſcended from the race

Of

Of our Aſſyrian kings, and ſoon may claim
My right of empire here, as next the throne;
And therefore means to blend his int'reſt here
With mine, and gain the ſceptre for himſelf:
But if the youth whom Ninus had decreed,
Ev'n from my infant years, to be my huſband,
The ſon of great Semiramis, and heir
Of Babylon, were living now, and here
Wou'd offer me his heart and half his empire,
By love I ſwear, and by thy precious ſelf,
Ninias ſhou'd ſue in vain, and ſee me quit
A throne with him for baniſhment with thee,
Ev'n Scythia's bleak inhoſpitable plains
Wou'd yield a ſweet aſylum to our loves;
For they wou'd echo my Arſaces' name,
And ſound his praiſe: thoſe barren wilds, where firſt
Our paſſion grew, wou'd be to me a court,
Nor ſhou'd I caſt a thought on Babylon.
But much I fear this ſubtle ſtateſman means
To carry his reſentment further ſtill:
I've ſearch'd his ſoul, and know the blackneſs of it:
Or I miſtake, or guilt fits ſlightly on him;
Already he is jealous of thy glory,
He fears, and hates thee.

Arſ. And I hate him more,
But fear him not, ſince Azema is mine:
Keep thou thy faith, and I deſpiſe his anger.
At leaſt I ſhare with him the royal favour:
I ſaw the queen, and her humanity
Equal'd the pride of Aſſur: when I fell
Proſtrate before her, gently ſhe uprais'd me,
And call'd me the ſupport of Babylon:
With pride I heard the flatt'ring voice of her
Whoſe name contending kings unite to honour:
The diſtance 'twixt her royal ſtate and mine
Was leſſen'd ſoon by mildeſt condeſcenſion;
It touch'd, it melted me; and, after thee,
To me ſhe ſeem'd, of all the human race,
Moſt nearly to reſemble the divine.

Aze. If ſhe protects us, Aſſur's threats are vain,
I heed them not.

Arſ. Inſpir'd by thee, I went,
Fearleſs and brave, to lay before the feet
Of my great miſtreſs, that aſpiring paſſion
Which Aſſur dreads, and Azema approves;
When lo, that very moment came a prieſt
From Ægypt with Ammonian Jove's decree:
Trembling ſhe open'd quick the awful ſcroll,
Firſt fix'd her eyes on me, then ſudden turn'd
Her face aſide, and wept: ſtood fix'd in grief
Like one diſtraught, then ſigh'd, and vaniſh'd from me.
They tell me, ſhe is fall'n into deſpair,
And hath of late been dreadfully purſued
By ſome avenging god: I pity her:
'Tis wonderful, that after fifteen years,
Heav'n, that ſo long defended, ſhou'd at laſt
Oppreſs her thus: by what hath ſhe offended
The angry gods, and wherefore are they chang'd?

Aze. We hear of nought but dreadful ſpectres, omens,
And vengeance from above: the queen of late
Lets looſe the reins of empire: we had cauſe
To fear for Babylon, leſt ſubtle Aſſur,
Who knows her weakneſs, in this dang'rous time,
Shou'd ſeize the helm, and bury all in ruin:
But the queen came, and all was calm again;
All own'd the pow'r of her deſpotic ſway.
If I have any knowledge of the court,
The queen hates Aſſur, but keeps fair with him,
And watches cloſe: they're fearful of each other,
Wou'd quarrel ſoon, but that ſome ſecret cauſe,
Some mutual int'reſt, ſtill prevents a rupture:
I ſaw her fire indignant at his name;
The bluſhes on her cheeks betray'd her thoughts,
And her heart ſeem'd to glow with deep reſentment:
But ſudden changes happen in a court;
Return, and ſpeak to her.

Arſ. I will; but know not
Whether again I e'er ſhall gain admittance.

Aze. Thou haſt my vows, my wiſhes, and my pray'rs
For thy ſucceſs: I glory in my love,
And in my duty: let Semiramis
Rule o'er the vanquiſh'd Eaſt, I envy her

Nor

Nor fame nor conqueſt; let the world be her's,
Arſaces mine: but Aſſur comes this way.
Arſ. The traitor! how I ſhudder at his preſence!
My ſoul abhors him.

SCENE II.

ASSUR, ARSACES, AZEMA.

Aſſ. Your reception, Sir,
I find, was noble, ſuch as kings have oft
Solicited in vain: you ſaw the queen
In ſecret, did ſhe not reprove a conduct
Injurious to my honour and her own?
Did ſhe not tell you Azema's deſign'd
For Aſſur, not for thee? Long ſince her hand
To Ninias giv'n was for the blood of kings
Alone reſerv'd; and therefore is my right,
As next to the throne: did ſhe acquaint you, Sir,
Into what fatal ſnares your pride wou'd lead you,
That neither fame nor honours will excuſe
Your bold pretenſions?
Arſ. I well know what's due
To your high birth, and to the rank you bear,
And ſhou'd have paid it, tho' you had not thus
Inſtructed me; but as a maſter here
I own you not: your royal anceſtors,
From Belus ſprung, perhaps may give you claim
To Azema; the welfare of the ſtate,
Preſent and future, all, I own, conſpire
To raiſe your hopes of bliſs, and make her yours:
Theſe are your claims, and I acknowledge them:
But I have one that's worth 'em all: I love her:
I might have added this, that I reveng'd
And ſav'd her, gave new luſtre to the throne
Which ſhe was born to fill, if I had choſen,
Like thee, to boaſt of my exploits before her.

But I muſt leave thee, to perform her orders,
Semiramis and her I ſhall obey,
And them alone: a day perhaps may come
When thou ſhalt be our maſter: heav'n ſometimes
In anger ſends us kings: but thou'rt deceiv'd,
At leaſt in one of thy ambitious views,
If 'amongſt thy ſubjects thou haſt rank'd Arſaces.

Aſſ. The meaſure's full: thou court'ſt thy own deſtruction.

SCENE III.

ASSUR, AZEMA.

Aſſ. I've borne his inſolence too long already,
'Tis time we enter on a nobler ſubject,
And worthier thy attention.

Aze. Can there be one?
But ſpeak.

Aſſ. Ere long all Aſia ſhall attend
On our reſolves, and low concerns like theſe
Muſt paſs unheeded by: a world demands
Our mutual care: Semiramis is now
The ſhadow of herſelf, her glory's paſt,
That ſtar which ſhone with ſuch tranſcendent luſtre,
Declining now, ſends forth a feeble ray;
The people ſee and wonder at her fall,
Whilſt ev'ry tongue demands a——ſucceſſor:
That word ſufficeth: you well know my right:
'Tis not for love to deal forth ſov'reign pow'r,
And point out who ſhall rule in Babylon;
Not that my ſoul, to beauty blind, wou'd make
A virtue of inſenſibility;
But I ſhou'd bluſh for thee and for myſelf,
To ſee the welfare of a nation thus
Dependent on a ſigh: thoughts worthier both
Muſt guide my fortune, and determine thine:
Our anceſtors the ſame, we ſhou'd offend
Their venerable ſhades, and loſe the world

By

By not uniting: I aſtoniſh you:
Theſe are harſh words for tender age like thine;
But I addreſs me to the kings and heroes
From whom you ſprung, to all thoſe demi-gods
Whom here you repreſent: too long trod down
Beneath a woman's feet their aſhes lay,
Their glories ſhe eclips'd, uſurp'd their pow'r,
And fetter'd vanquiſh'd nations with her laws;
But ſhe is gone, and thou muſt now ſupport
The building ſhe has rais'd: ſhe had thy beauty,
And thou muſt have her courage: let not love
Or folly wreſt the ſceptre from thy hand,
But graſp it cloſe: you will not ſacrifice
To a Sarmatian's idle paſſion for you
The name you ought to honour, and the throne
You ſhou'd aſcend of univerſal empire.

Aze. Let not Arſaces be the theme, my lord,
Of your reproaches, but depend on me
To vindicate the honour of my race,
And to defend, whene'er occaſion calls,
The rights of my lov'd anceſtors; I know
Their worth and virtues, but I know not one
Amongſt the heroes which Aſſyria boaſts
More great, more virtuous, more belov'd, than him,
Than this Sarmatian, whom you thus diſdain.
Do juſtice to his merit: for myſelf,
When I ſhall bend to Hymen's laws, the queen
Muſt guide my choice, and at her hands alone
Will I receive a maſter: for the croud,
The babbling echo of one ſecret voice,
I heed it not; nor know I if the people
Are tir'd of their obedience to a woman,
But ſtill I ſee them bow the knee before her;
And if they murmur, murmur in the duſt:
The hand of heav'n, they ſay, is rais'd againſt her:
I am a ſtranger to her guilt, but think
That heav'n wou'd never have made choice of thee
To tell its high commands, or miniſter
Its juſtice to mankind: Semiramis
Is ſtill a queen, and you, who lord it here,
Receive from her the laws which you diſpenſe:

For me, I own her power, and her's alone:
My glory's to obey, be thine the ſame.

SCENE IV.

ASSUR, CEDAR.

Obey! I bluſh to think how long already
I have obey'd: O inſupportable!
But ſay, haſt thou ſucceeded, are the ſeeds
Of hatred ſown in ſecret thro' the realm?
Will they ſpring up into a fruitful harveſt
Of diſcord and rebellion?

Ced. All is well:
The people, long deluded by the arts
And dazzling glory of Semiramis,
At length have loſt their idle veneration:
No longer chain'd to ſilence, they demand
A ſucceſſor: each lover of his country
Calls for a maſter, and looks up to thee.

Aſſ. Heart-burning care! and ever-during ſhame!
Still muſt my hopes, my fate depend on her?
Was it for this that Ninus and his ſon
Fell by my hand, that Aſſur might be ſtill
Only her firſt of ſlaves? So near the throne,
To languiſh in illuſtrious ſervitude,
And only be the ſecond of mankind!
The queen was ſatisfy'd with Ninus' death,
But I went further, and purſued my blow:
Ninias, in ſecret murther'd by my order,
Open'd my paſſage to the throne; but ſhe
Deny'd me entrance.—A long time in vain
I ſooth'd her pride with flatt'ry on her charms;
Still hoped one day to gain upon her youth
That happy influence, which aſſiduous care
And humble adoration ſeldom fail
To win, o'er artleſs minds that bend with eaſe:
I little knew the firmneſs of her ſoul,
Inflexible, and bold: the world alone

Cou'd

Cou'd ſatisfy her pride: ſhe ſeem'd indeed
Moſt worthy of it: ſpite of my reſentment,
I own ſhe was, and yield the praiſe ſhe merits.
The reins of empire, that flow'd looſe before,
Strongly ſhe held; appeas'd the murm'ring croud,
Silenc'd their plaints, and quaſh'd conſpiring rebels;
Fought like a hero, like a monarch rul'd:
She led her army and her people captive,
And ſpite of fame, with more than magic art,
Chain'd down the minds of men: the univerſe
Aſtoniſh'd ſtood, and trembled at her feet,
In ſhort, her beauty, woman's beſt ſupport,
Strengthen'd the laws which pow'r and valour made;
And when I ſtrove to raiſe conſpiracies
My friends ſtood mute, and only cou'd admire her.
At length the charm is broke: her pow'r decays;
Her genius droops; remorſe and idle fears,
And fond credulity have bound her faith
To lying oracles, which knaviſh prieſts
Had taught to ſpeak in Ægypt's barren plain:
She pours her daily incenſe at their altars,
And wearies Heav'n with vows: Semiramis
Creeps on a level now with common mortals,
And condeſcends to fear: I know her weakneſs:
Know, till ſhe falls, Aſſur can never riſe:
But I have rais'd the people's voice againſt her,
And ſhe muſt yield: this blow decides her fate:
If ſhe conſents to give me Azema,
She is no longer queen; if ſhe refuſes,
The kingdom will revolt: on every ſide
The ſnare is laid, and nothing now can ſave her.
Yet, after all, perhaps I am deceiv'd,
And fortune, ſo long call'd for, comes at laſt
But to betray me.

Ced. If the queen is forc'd
To name a ſucceſſor, and yield the princeſs
To Aſſur's bed, what can he have to fear,
When the divided branch of Aſia's kings
Shall be united? all conſpires to pave
Your way to empire.

Aſſ. Azema is ſafe;
She muſt be mine; but wherefore ſend ſo far
For this Arſaces? ſhe ſupports him too;
And when I wou'd chaſtiſe his inſolence,
Her interpoſing hand prevents me ſtill:
A miniſter without the pow'r, a prince
Without a ſubject, girt around with honours,
And yet a poor dependent, what is Aſſur?
All, all unite to perſecute me now:
A peeviſh miſtreſs, and a haughty rival,
Conſulted prieſts that teach their gods to ſpeak
Againſt me; with Semiramis, who ſtrives
To free herſelf, yet trembles at my preſence:
But we ſhall ſee how far this proud ingrate
Will urge an angry rebel who defies her.

SCENE V.

ASSUR, OTANES, CEDAR.

Ota. My lord, the queen commands you to attend her
In ſecret, and alone.
Aſſ. I ſhall obey
Her ſacred orders, and with care perform
My ſov'reign's will.

SCENE VI.

ASSUR, CEDAR.

Aſſ. Whence ſprings this ſudden change?
Theſe three months paſt ſhe has avoided me,
Ev'n as the object of her hatred: oft
When ſhe beheld me ſhe wou'd caſt her eyes
Down on the earth, as if ſhe loath'd the ſight:
Whene'er we met, 'twas in a gaping croud
Of hearers; when ſhe ſpoke, her ſighs and tears

Wou'd

Wou'd interrupt our converſe, or perchance
Silence was all the anſwer ſhe wou'd give me.
What can ſhe want? What can ſhe ſay to me?
But here ſhe comes: 'tis ſhe—wait you within.
[*To* Cedar.

SCENE VII.

SEMIRAMIS, ASSUR.

Sem. My lord, I come to eaſe a troubled heart
Of its long hidden woes, and pour it all
Before you: I have ruled o'er Aſia long,
And not inglorious: Babylon perhaps
May pay this tribute to my memory,
And ſay, Semiramis deſerv'd to rank
Among the greateſt of her kings: thy hands
Have help'd me to ſupport the weight of empire;
With abſolute dominion have I ruled,
Ador'd by all, and crown'd with victory
On ev'ry ſide: intoxicated long
With flatt'ry's pleaſing incenſe, I forgot
The crimes that rais'd me to this envy'd ſtate;
Forgot the juſtice of high heav'n: it comes;
It ſpeaks to me: Semiramis muſt yield:
This noble ſtructure, which I fondly thought
Superior to the injuries of time,
Is tott'ring now, and ſhakes from its foundation;
Means muſt be found to ſtrengthen and ſupport it.
Aſſ. The work is yours, and you muſt finiſh it:
Foreſee th' attacks of time, and ſtop his rapine:
Who ſhall obſcure the luſtre of thy days,
Or wherefore fear'ſt thou heav'n whilſt earth obeys thee?
Sem. Yonder the aſhes of my huſband lie;
Can'ſt thou look there, and wonder at my fears?
Aſſ. I cannot bear to hear the noiſy croud
Still talk of Ninus: wherefore ſhou'd remembrance
Call back the thoughts of that inglorious reign?
Can they believe, that, after fifteen years,

His angry ſpirit ſtill calls out for juſtice?
Ere now he wou'd have ta'en due vengeance on us,
Had he the pow'r: why from the peaceful realms
Of dark oblivion woud'ſt thou call the dead,
Or ſearch for truth in lying oracles?
I am aſtoniſh'd too, but 'tis at thee,
And thy vain fears: to make the gods propitious,
We muſt be reſolute: this idle phantom,
At once the child and parent of your fears,
Why ſhou'd it thus alarm you? Prodigies
Never appear to thoſe who dread them not:
Baits to allure th' unthinking multitude,
By knaves invented, and by fools believ'd;
The great deſpiſe them: but if nobler views
Inſpire thy ſoul t'immortalize the blood
Of Belus, if the beauteous Azema
Claims her high rank.——

Sem. Aſſur, on that I came
To ſpeak with thee: our Babylon demands,
For ſuch is Ammon's will, a ſucceſſor:
Heav'n and my people will be ſatisfy'd
When I ſhall take a partner to my throne:
Thou know'ſt, my pride cou'd never condeſcend
To a divided ſway; 'twas my reſolve
To rule alone, whilſt the impatient world
Urg'd me in vain; and when the people's voice,
Which now is echo'd by the voice of heav'n,
Still preſs'd me, in the bloom of youth, to give
A ſov'reign to mankind, I ſtill refus'd:
If I had yielded then to any claim,
It had been thine; you had a right to hope,
And to expect it; but you knew too well,
How much Semiramis abhorr'd a maſter.
Without ſubmitting to a tie ſo fatal,
I made thee then the ſecond of mankind,
And only not my equal; 'twas enough,
I thought, to ſatisfy ev'n thy ambition.
At length the gods make known their will divine,
And I obey them: hear the oracle:
" All ſhall again be well at Babylon,
" When Hymen's torch a ſecond time ſhall blaze
" Propitious;

" Propitious; then ſhalt thou, O cruel wife,
" And wretched mother, then ſhall thou appeaſe
" The ſhade of Ninus." Thus the voice of heav'n
Declares its ſacred will: I know thy arts,
Know, thou haſt form'd a party in the ſtate,
And mean t'oppoſe me with the royal blood
From whence you ſprung: from thee and Azema
My ſucceſſor, it ſeems, muſt riſe; I know
You look that way, and ſhe perhaps aſpires
To equal honours; but, obſerve me well:
I ſhall not ſuffer your united claims
To rob me of my right: remember, Sir,
You know my will; 'tis conſtant, and as fate
Irrevocable: think'ſt thou now the God
Whoſe arms is lifted o'er me hath depriv'd
My ſoul of all its wonted ſtrength and ſpirit,
Or doſt thou ſtill behold Semiramis,
Who can ſupport the honour of her throne?
Know, Babylon ere long ſhall at my hands
Receive a maſter: whether the high choice
Shall fall on thee, or be another's lot,
I'll take a ſov'reign as a ſov'reign ought:
Bring me the magi and the princes here
To join their voices with Semiramis,
To give away my freedom and my empire
Is the firſt, greateſt act of royal pow'r,
And therefore let it be perform'd with awe
And ſilence due to my authority.
Heav'n hath appointed this great day to ſhew
Its mercy to me, and the gods at length
Remit their anger; nothing can diſarm it
But my repentance; 'tis the only virtue:
Truſt me, it is, howe'er you may deſpiſe it,
Remaining for the guilty: weak, I know,
And fearful thou eſteem'ſt me; but henceforth
Remember, Aſſur, guilt alone is weakneſs:
Think not that fear can e'er diſgrace a throne,
It has done good to kings, and might to thee:

I tell

I tell thee, ſtateſman, to obey the gods,
*And tremble at their pow'r, is no abaſement.

SCENE VIII.

ASSUR alone.

Aſtoniſhment! ſuch language, ſuch deſigns!
Or is it artifice, or weakneſs in her,
Or cowardice or courage? Does ſhe mean,
By yielding thus, to prop her tott'ring pow'r,
And by our union to defeat my purpoſe?
I muſt not think, it ſeems, of Azema,
Becauſe, perhaps, I'm deſtin'd for herſelf.
It muſt be ſo. What all my cares in vain
Solicited, my flatt'ry of her charms,
My deep intrigues, and our united crimes,
With all her fears, cou'd never gain, at length
An idle dream, and a dark oracle
From Ægypt have perform'd. What pow'r unknown
Decrees the fate of mortals? Great events
Hang on the ſlend'reſt thread: ſtill I am doubtful:
I'll ſee Semiramis again; ſhe ſeem'd
Too much in haſte; ſuch ſudden reſolutions
Betray an over-anxious mind, and thoſe
Who change with eaſe are either weak, or wicked.

END of the SECOND ACT.

* The enormous length of this ſpeech, is a ſufficient proof of what Mr. Voltaire has advanc'd in the preface, viz. that moſt of the French tragedies are nothing but long diſcourſes: this conſiſts of no leſs than ſixty-four lines, and is enough to tire the pipe of the moſt long-winded actor. Semiramis, however, has beauties, which few of them have, to make amends for the tediouſneſs of declamation, which in other writers, and even ſometimes in Voltaire, is inſupportable.

ACT III. SCENE I.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES.

[*The ſcene repreſents an apartment in the palace.*]

Sem. Who wou'd have thought, Otanes, that the gods,
Offended as they were, at length ſhou'd ſmile
Propitious thus, and threaten but to ſave!
Shou'd drop th' uplifted thunder from their hand,
And pardon me; ſhou'd ſend Arſaces hither
To change my fate! for know it is their will
That I ſhou'd wed, and by a ſecond tie
Expiate the crimes of my firſt fatal nuptials.
They are the great diſpoſers of our hearts,
And mine with pleaſure yields to their decrees:
It ev'n outruns their purpoſes: Arſaces,
I'm thine; for thou wert born to rule o'er me,
And o'er the world.

Ota. Arſaces! he!

Sem. Thou know'ſt,
In Scythia's plains, when I reveng'd the Perſian,
And conquer'd Aſia, this young hero fought
Beneath his father's banners, and ſurrounded
With captives, brought to me the bloody ſpoils,
And, bluſhing, laid his victims at my feet.
When firſt I ſaw him, I cou'd feel his heart,
As by ſome ſecret pow'r, attracting mine
Inſenſibly towards him; all mankind,
Beſides Arſaces, ſeem'd not worth my notice.
Aſſur grew jealous of him, and e'er ſince
Has fir'd with indignation at his name;
Whilſt his dear image ſtill employ'd my thoughts,
Before that voice, which guides my ev'ry word

And ev'ry action, named him for my huſband,
Before the gods had pointed out Arſaces.

Ota. It was indeed a noble conqueſt, thus
To bend that haughty ſpirit which diſdain'd
The proffer'd homage of our eaſtern monarchs,
Who as her ſubjects, not as lovers, ſtill
Accepted kings? You who contemn'd thoſe charms,
That ſov'reign beauty, which extended wide
Your univerſal empire; whilſt your eyes
Pierc'd ev'ry heart, you ſcarce wou'd condeſcend
To mark their pow'r; and doſt thou yield at laſt
To love's imperious ſway; to fears and horror
Succeed the tender paſſions? Can it be?

Sem. O, no: it is not love: I am not fall'n
So much beneath myſelf, as to beſtow
On beauty the reward that's due to virtue;
I feel a nobler paſſion in my breaſt:
Alas! ſuch weakneſs wou'd but ill become
Semiramis: unhappy as I am,
For me to think of love, Otanes, how
Coud'ſt thou ſuppoſe it? Once I was a mother,
But ſcarce had ſtudy'd to deſerve the name
By my fond cares, when heav'n in anger ſnatch'd
My child away, and left me here alone
A prey to anguiſh. I had nothing near me
That I cou'd love; and, midſt my grandeur, felt
An aching void within my ſoul. I fled
The court, endeavour'd to avoid myſelf,
And ſought relief in theſe proud monuments,
Amuſing flatt'rers of a reſtleſs heart
That ſhunn'd reflection: reſt was ſtill a ſtranger,
And long remain'd ſo; but he comes once more,
I feel him now, and wonder at the pow'r
That charm'd him hither: 'twas Arſaces; he
Shall hold the place of huſband and of ſon,
A conquer'd world, and all my glories paſt.
How much I owe to thee, cœleſtial pow'r,
Who thus propitious lead'ſt me to the altar
So long abhor'd; and haſt thyſelf inſpir'd
That paſſion which alone can make me happy!

Ota.

Ota. But what will be the rage and grief of Aſſur?
Haſt thou reflected on it, when he hears
Thy new reſolves? He is not without hopes:
The people have already fix'd thy choice
On him, and his reſentment will not end
In mere complaints.

Sem. I never have deceiv'd
And therefore fear him not: theſe fifteen years,
Whate'er his views have been, I've taught him ſtill
To rank but with my ſubjects, tho' the firſt
Among'ſt them; and ſet bounds to his ambition,
Which he hath ne'er o'erleap'd: I reign'd alone;
And if this feeble hand ſo long cou'd guide
The helm of pow'r, and curb his haughtineſs,
What can his courage or his cunning do
Againſt Arſaces and Semiramis?
Yes: Ninus hath accepted my repentance,
And leaves the manſions of the dead to urge
Our happy union: his illuſtrious ſhade
Again wou'd rage to ſee his murth'rer ſeize
His throne and bed: this calls him from the tomb,
And Ammon's oracles unite with him
To crown my bliſs: no more the awful virtue
Of Oroes affrights me; I've ſent for him
To be a witneſs of the great event,
And ſoon expect him here.

Ota. His honour'd name
And ſacred character may give indeed
A ſanction to your choice.

Sem. I know it will,
And 'ſtabliſh my reſolves.

Ota. Behold, he comes.

SCENE II.

SEMIRAMIS, OROES.

Sem. Great ſucceſſor of Zoroaſtres, welcome:
To day muſt Babylon receive a king;

Thy

Thy office is to crown him; is all ready
For the ſolemnity?

Oro. The magi wait
Thy pleaſure, and the nobles all attend.
To pay obedience to the ſov'reign pow'r
Is all my duty, and I ſhall fulfil it:
I am not to judge kings, for that belongs
To heav'n alone.

Sem. By this myſterious language,
It ſeems you diſapprove my purpoſe.

Oro. Madam,
I know it not, but wiſh it fair ſucceſs. [ſigns

Sem. Thou can'ſt interpret heav'n's high will: theſe
Which I have ſeen, can they be fatal to me?
A ſpectre hath of late, perhaps ſome god,
Appear'd, and in the boſom of the earth
Re-enter'd ſoon: what pow'r hath thus broke down
Th' eternal barrier that divides the light
From darkneſs? wherefore ſhou'd a mortal thus
Riſe from the tomb to viſit me?

Oro. Know, heav'n
Doth oft ſuſpend its own eternal laws
When juſtice bids, reverſing death's decree;
Thus to chaſtiſe the ſov'reigns of the earth,
And terrify mankind.

Sem. The oracles
Demand a ſacrifice.

Oro. It ſhall be offer'd.

Sem. Eternal juſtice, thou whoſe piercing eye
Behold'ſt my naked heart, O fill it not
Again with horror, bury in oblivion
My firſt unhappy nuptials!
Oroes, ſtay. [*To* Oroes, *who is retiring.*

Oro. [*Returning.*] I thought my preſence might diſturb you, Madam.

Sem. Return, and anſwer me: this morning, ſay,
Did not Arſaces offer at your altars
Gifts to the gods?

Oro. He did; and precious were they:
Arſaces is the favourite of heav'n.

Sem.

Sem. I know he is, and I rejoice to hear it.
Can I be wretched if I truſt to him?
Oro. He is the empire's beſt ſupport; the gods
Conducted him; his glory is their care.
Sem. With tranſport I accept the fair preſage,
Whilſt hope and peace return to calm my breaſt.
Away: again let pureſt incence riſe
Before your altars; let your magi come
And ſanctify the choice; bring down the ſmiles
Of the aſſenting gods, and make us happy.
Henceforth may Babylon with me revive,
And ſhine amongſt the nations of the earth
With double ſplendor! Go thou, and prepare
The ſolemn pomp.

SCENE III.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES.

Sem. Heav'n ſeconds my deſign,
And I am only the interpreter
Of its high will, to give the world a maſter:
Thus to receive a kingdom at my hand
Will ſtrike him with aſtoniſhment: ev'n now
How little thinks he of th' approaching greatneſs!
How will proud Aſſur and his fawning croud
Be humbled! But a word, and the whole earth
Falls at his feet; and, grateful as he is,
I know he will repay me: I ſhall wed him,
And for my portion carry him a world;
My glory's pure, and now I ſhall enjoy it.

SCENE IV.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES, MITRANES.
An officer of the palace.

Ota. Arſaces begs admittance to your preſence,
To lay his ſorrows at your feet.

Sem.

Sem. Arſaces!
What ſorrows can Arſaces feel when I
Am near him, he who thus hath baniſh'd mine?
Quick, let him come: he knows not yet his pow'r
O'er the fond heart of Semiramis:
O thou dread ſhade, whoſe voice alarm'd my ſoul,
Whoſe blood no more calls out for vengeance on me,
And you, the guardian gods of this great empire,
Of the Aſſyrians, Ninus, and my ſon,
Unite to bleſs Arſaces! Ha! the ſight
Alarms me; whence can theſe ſtrange terrors riſe?

SCENE V.

SEMIRAMIS, ARSACES.

O queen, I am devoted to thy ſervice;
My life is thine; and when I ſhed this blood,
I am rewarded if it flow for thee.
My father had ſome ſmall renown in arms;
I ſaw him periſh bravely in the field,
And at the head of thy victorious bands;
He left his hapleſs ſon a fair example,
Perhaps but ill purſued: I'll not recal
The mem'ry of my father's ſervices,
'Twou'd ill become me; at your royal knees,
Tho' here I ſue for favour and protection:
Pity the raſhneſs of a guilty youth,
Who liſten'd to the dictates of imprudence,
And ev'n in ſerving fear'd he might offend you.
Sem. Offend me! thou Arſaces! fear it not.
Arſ. To day you give your kingdom and your hand:
My heart, I know, ſhou'd on the great event
Keep ſecret all its fears, and humbly ſtill
In ſilence, with depending monarchs, wait
To know our maſter; but this Aſſur ſteps
So haughtily, and triumphs in his conqueſt,
We cannot brook his pride: the people call him
Already their new ſov'reign; his high blood

And

And rank ſuppport him: may he prove himſelf
Worthy of both! but I have ſtill a ſoul
Too proud to bend beneath him, or adore
The pow'r I had defy'd: his jealous heart
I know deteſts Arſaces: let me then
Retire in ſafety, far from him, and thee:
Permit me to reviſit the dear climes,
Where firſt I ſerv'd my royal miſtreſs, there
His tyranny can never reach: perhaps
I may hereafter—

Sem. Wilt thou leave me then,
And fear'ſt thou Aſſur?

Arſ. No: Arſaces fears
Nought but the anger of Semiramis.
Perhaps thou know'ſt my fond ambition, then
I've cauſe indeed to tremble.

Sem. Hope the beſt,
And know that Aſſur ne'er ſhall be thy maſter.

Arſ. I own it ſhock'd my ſoul to look on him
As Ninus' ſucceſſor: but is he then
Deſign'd for Azema? forgive this bold
Preſumptuous queſtioner: long ſince I know
She was to Ninias giv'n, proud Aſſur ſprung
From the ſame race, and claims her as his own:
I am but a poor ſubject, yet I dare——

Sem. Such ſubjects are my kingdom's beſt ſupport;
I know thee well; thy noble ſoul, ſuperior
To vulgar minds, hath ſought Semiramis,
Not for her fortunes, but herſelf; thy eyes
Are fix'd on her true int'reſt, and on thee
I ſhall depend: Aſſur and Azema
Shall never meet; their union would be dang'rous:
But their deſigns are known, and by my care
Will be prevented.

Arſ. Since my heart at length
I open to thee, and thou haſt diſcover'd——

[AZEMA *enters ſuddenly, and throws herſelf at the feet of Semiramis*]

O Queen, permit me thus——

Sem. Riſe, Azema:
Where'er my choice may light, thou may'ſt depend

On

On my protection, and ſhalt find reſpect
Due to thy birth; for, deſtin'd as thou wert
To be the wife of my lamented ſon,
I look upon thee with a mother's eye:
[*To them both.*
Go, place yourſelf with theſe whom I have call'd
To witneſs my reſolves, and mark my choice.
[*To* Arſaces.
Be thou, my beſt protector, near the throne.

SCENE VI.

The apartment of Semiramis opens into a magnificent ſaloon richly ornamented; a number of officers in their proper habits on the ſteps of the throne, which is rais'd in the middle; the ſatraps on each ſide: the high-prieſt enters with the magi, and places himſelf between Aſſur and Arſaces: the queen in the midſt with Azema, and her attendants: guards at the lower end of the ſaloon.

Oro. Ye princes, magi, warriors, the ſupport
Of Babylon, aſſembled by command
From great Semiramis, the will of heav'n
Soon ſhall ye know: the gods, that guard our empire,
Have fix'd on this important hour to work
A great and mighty change; whoe'er the queen
Shall here appoint her ſov'reign, and our own,
It is our duty to obey; and here
I bring my tribute to the throne, my pray'rs
And wiſhes for the glory and the welfare
Of them, and of their kingdom: may theſe days
Of joy and gladneſs ne'er be chang'd to hours
Of grief and ſorrow, nor theſe ſongs of mirth
To mournful plaints!

Aze. A king, my lords, will ſoon
Be nam'd; whoe'er he be, the choice will injure
Myſelf alone; but Azema was born
And muſt remain a ſubject; I ſubmit
To the queen's pleaſure, and on her protection

Shall

Shall ſtill depend; nor with the dark preſage
Of future ills ſhall interrupt your joy:
But leave you my example of obedience.

Aſs. Howe'er the queen may chooſe, and heav'n determine,
We muſt conſult the public good alone;
Let us then ſwear by this imperial throne,
And great Semiramis, to yield ſubmiſſive,
And without murm'ring, to obey her will.

Arſ. I ſwear it; and this arm that fought for her,
This heart, obedient ever to her voice,
Which next the voice of heav'n I ſtill rever'd,
This blood, which flow'd with pleaſure for her ſake,
Shall be devoted to that royal maſter
Whom ſhe appoints.

High-p. I wait the great award
Of heaven and Semiramis

Sem. Enough:
Each to his place, and now attend, my people.
(*She ſeats herſelf on the throne.*)
Azema, Aſſur, *the* High-Prieſt, *and* Arſaces *take their places, and ſhe proceeds.*
If in that hand, which cuſtom and the laws
Of an imperious huſband had confin'd
To homely cares, and to a diſtaff chain'd,
I bore aloft the ſceptre and the ſword,
Beyond my ſubjects' hope, nor ſunk beneath
The weight of empire, let me now extend
To lateſt times its glory: 'tis my purpoſe
This day to take a partner in the throne:
The gods muſt be obey'd, whoſe dread command
At length ſubdued my long unconquer'd heart:
They, who depriv'd me of my ſon, perhaps
May one day raiſe an heir to Babylon
Worthy of empire, who ſhall follow me
Thro' all the thorny paths that I have trod,
Finiſh my work, and make my reign immortal.
I might have choſe a ſov'reign from the kings
That dwell around me, but they're all my foes,
Or tributary ſlaves: a foreign hand
Shall never wield this ſceptre: my own ſubjects

Are

Are better than the kings which they have conquer'd:
Belus was born a ſubject; if he gain'd
The diadem, he ow'd it to the people,
And to himſelf: by rights like his I hold
The pow'r ſupreme; and, miſtreſs of a kingdom
Larger than his, have bent beneath my yoke
The nations of the Eaſt, which Belus ne'er
Had ſeen or heard of: what he but attempted
Semiramis perform'd; for they who found
A kingdom, and they only, can preſerve it.
You want a king who may be worthy of you,
Worthy of ſuch an empire, ſhall I add
Worthy the hand that crowns him, and the heart
Which I ſhall give: I have conſulted heav'n,
My country's weal, the int'reſt of mankind,
And choſe a king to make the world more happy.
Adore the hero, ſee in him reviv'd
The princes of my honour'd race; obſerve him,
And know, this king, this hero, is—Arſaces.

[*She deſcends from the throne, and they all riſe.*

Aze. Arſaces! the perfidious——

Aſſ. Rage and vengeance!

Arſ. Believe me, Azema——

Oro. Juſt heav'n! avert
Theſe omens!

Sem. Thou who ſanctify'ſt my choice,
Confirm it at the altar: ſee in him
Ninus and Ninias both reſtor'd.
O heav'n! [*It thunders, and the tomb ſhakes.*
What do I hear?

Oro. Great gods, protect us now!

Sem. The thunder comes, in anger or in love
I know not: pardon, gracious gods! Arſaces
Muſt win them to forgiveneſs. Ha! what voice
Diſtracts me thus? and ſee, the tomb is open.
O heav'n! I die.

[*The ghoſt of Ninus comes out of the tomb.*

Aſſ. The ſhade of Ninus' ſelf.
Gods! is it poſſible?

Arſ.

Arſ. What ſay'ſt thou? ſpeak,
Thou god of terrors.
Aſſ. O unfold thy tale.
Sem. Com'ſt thou to pardon, or to puniſh me?
It is thy ſceptre and thy bed which here
I have beſtow'd: ſpeak, is he worthy of it?
Determine: I obey thee.

The GHOST *of* NINUS *to* ARSACES.

Thou ſhalt reign,
Arſaces, but there are ſome dreadful crimes
Which thou muſt expiate: hie thee to the tomb,
And to my aſhes offer ſacrifice:
Serve me and Ninias: remember well
Thy father: liſten to the pontiff.
Arſ. O!
Thou venerable ſhade, thou demi-god,
Who dwell'ſt within theſe walls, the ſight of thee
Inſpires but not aſtoniſhes Arſaces:
Yes, I will go, on peril of my life,
And meet thee in the tomb: but tell me, what
Muſt be the ſacrifice? O ſpeak! he's gone.

[*The ghoſt retires towards the entrance of the mauſolæum.*

Sem. Thou honour'd ſpirit of my lord, permit me
Thus on my knees to pour my ſorrows forth,
Permit me in the tomb to——

GHOST *at the entrance of the tomb.*

Stop: no farther:
Reſpect my aſhes: when the time is come,
I'll ſend for thee.

[*The ghoſt goes into the tomb, and the mauſolæum cloſes.*

Aſſ. Amazing!
Sem. Follow me,
My people, to the temple: be not thus
Diſmay'd: for know, the gentle ſhade of Ninus
Is not implacable; it loves your king,
And therefore will it ſpare Semiramis:
Heav'n that inſpir'd my choice will now ſupport it:
Haſte then, and pray for me, and for Arſaces.

End of the Third Act.

ACT

ACT IV. SCENE I.

Repreſenting the porch of the temple.

ARSACES, AZEMA.

Arſ. DO not oppreſs me in this hour of grief,
And aggravate my ſorrows; I have borne
Enough already: this dread oracle
Affrights me; prodigies on ev'ry ſide
Diſturb the courſe of nature: heav'n deprives me
Of all, if Azema is loſt.

Aze. No more,
Falſe man, nor to the horrors of this day
Add the remembrance of thy perfidy;
No more the terrors of Semiramis,
The walking ſpectre, and the opening grave,
Appal me now; of all the prodigies
Which I have ſeen, thy baſe inconſtancy
Hath ſhock'd me moſt: go on, appeaſe the ſhade
Of Ninus, and begin the ſacrifice
With Azema; behold, and ſtrike the victim.

Arſ. It is too much; my heart was not prepar'd
Againſt this cruel ſtroke: thou know'ſt, my ſoul
Prefers thee to the empire of the world:
What was the object of that fame in arms
I held ſo dear, of all my victories?
All my ambition hoped for was at laſt
To merit thee: Semiramis, thou know'ſt,
Was dear to both; thy tongue unites with mine
To praiſe her, ſhe was ſtill the guardian god
That cheriſh'd and protected us; as ſuch
We both revered her with that pious zeal
And chaſte regard which mortals bear to heav'n:
Judge of my ſpotleſs faith by my ſurpriſe

At

At the queen's choice, and mark the precipice
It leads us to, thence learn our future fate.
Aze. I know it.
Arſ. Learn, that neither thou nor empire
Were deſtin'd for Arſaces; know, that ſon
Whom I muſt ſerve, the child of Ninus, he
Who muſt inherit here——
Aze. Well; what of him?
Arſ. That Ninias, he who from his cradle lit
The torch of Hymen with thee, who was born
My rival and my maſter——
Aze. Ninias!
Arſ. Lives;
And will be with us ſoon.
Aze. Ha! then the queen——
Arſ. Ev'n to this day deceiv'd, laments his death.
Aze. Ninias alive!
Arſ. It is a ſecret yet
Within the temple, and ſhe knows it not.
Aze. But Ninus crowns thee, and his widow's thine.
Arſ. Ay, but his ſon was born for Azema;
He is my king, ſo ſays the oracle,
And I muſt ſerve him.
Aze. But love claims his own,
And will be heard in ſpite of all, Arſaces:
His orders are not doubtful, or obſcure.
Love is my oracle, and that alone
Shall be obey'd. Ninias, thou ſay'ſt, yet lives,
Let him appear, and let Semiramis
Recal her plighted faith to him; let Ninus
Riſe from the tomb, to join the fatal knot
Made in our infant years; let Ninias come,
My king, thy maſter, and thy rival, fired
With all the love which once Arſaces had
For Azema, then ſee how I will ſlight
His proffer'd vows; then ſhalt thou ſee me ſcorn
The ſceptre at my feet, and ſpurn a crown
Which is my due: where is he now? What ſecret,
What myſt'ry veils him from us? Let him come;
But know, nor Ninias, nor Semiramis,
No, nor the ſacred ſpirit of his father

Ris'n from the tomb, not all the pow'rs of nature
Thrown in confuſion, from my heart ſhou'd wreſt
The image of my perjur'd dear Arſaces:
Go, aſk thy own, if it will dare to act
As mine hath done. What are thoſe dreadful crimes
Which thou muſt expiate? if thou e'er ſhoud'ſt break
The ſacred tye that binds us, if thou'rt falſe,
I know no crime, no treach'ry like thy own.
I ſee the ſage interpreter of fate
This way advancing; love will never plead
Thy cauſe with heav'n, if thou betray'ſt me: go,
From Ninus' hand receive thy doom; remember,
Thy fate depends on heav'n, and mine on thee.
[*Exit* Azema.

Arſ. Arſaces ſtill is thine: ſtay, cruel maid:
How mingled is our happineſs and woe!
What ſtrange events that contradict each other——

SCENE II.

ARSACES, OROES, the magi attending.

Oro. Let us retire to yonder lonely walk;
[*To* Arſaces.
I ſee you are much mov'd: prepare yourſelf
For ſtrokes more dreadful. [*To the magi.*
Bring the royal wreath. [*The magi bring the coffer.*
This letter, and this ſacred ſword, to thee,
Arſaces, I deliver.

Arſ. Rev'rend father,
Wilt thou not ſave me from the precipice
That gapes before me? wilt thou not at length
Uplift the veil, that from my eyes conceals
My future fate?

Oro. 'Twill be remov'd, my ſon;
The hour is come, when in his dreary manſions,
Ninus from thee expects a ſacrifice
That ſhall appeaſe his angry ſpirit.

Arſ.

Arſ. What
Can Ninus aſk, what ſacrifice from me?
Muſt I be his avenger, when his ſon
Still lives? Let Ninias come; he is my king,
And I will ſerve him.
Oro. 'Tis his father's will,
Thou muſt obey him: an hour hence, Arſaces,
Be at his tomb, arm'd with this ſacred ſword,
And with this wreath adorn'd, which Ninus wore,
And which thyſelf did bring to me.
Arſ. The wreath
Of Ninus!
Oro. 'Tis his royal will that thus
Thou ſhoud'ſt appear, to offer up the blood
That muſt be ſhed; the victim will be there:
Strike thou, and leave the reſt to him, and heav'n.
Arſ. If he requires my life, I'll give it him:
But where is Ninias? thou ſpeak'ſt nought of him:
Thou haſt not told me how his father gives
To me his kingdom and his queen.
Oro. To thee
His queen! O heav'n, to thee Semiramis
Be giv'n! Arſaces, the important hour
Which I had promis'd thee is come, when thou
Shalt know thy fate, and this abandon'd woman.
Arſ. Great gods!
Oro. 'Twas ſhe who murther'd Ninus.
Arſ. She,
Saidſt thou, the queen?
Oro. Aſſur, that foul diſgrace
Of human nature, Aſſur gave the poiſon.
Arſ. I'm not ſurpris'd at Aſſur's cruelty,
But that a wife, a queen, and ſuch a queen,
The pride of ſov'reigns, the delight of nations,
That ſhe ſhou'd e'er be guilty of a crime
So horrible! it paſſes all belief.
How can ſuch virtues and ſuch guilt as hers
Subſiſt together!
Oro. How indeed! the queſtion
Is worthy of thy noble heart: but now
'Twere needleſs to diſſemble, ev'ry moment

Is big with ſome new ſecret, horrible
To nature, who already whiſpers to thee
Her ſoft complaints; thy gen'rous heart, I ſee,
Spite of thy ſelf, is ſhock'd, and mourns within thee;
But wonder not that Ninus from the tomb
Indignant riſes on this ſeat of guilt:
He comes to break the horrid nuptial tie,
Wov'n by the furies, and expoſe to light
Unpuniſh'd crimes; to ſave his ſon from inceſt:
He ſpeaks to, he expects thee: know thy father,
For thou art Ninias, and the queen's thy mother.

Arſ. Thou haſt o'erpow'r'd me in one dreadful moment
With ſuch repeated wonders, that I ſtand
Aſtoniſh'd, and the night of death ſurrounds me.
Am I his ſon, and can it be?

Oro. Thou art:
Ninus, the morn before he dy'd, foreſaw
His end approaching; knew the deadly draught
Which he had drank was miniſter'd to thee
By the ſame hand, and, dying as thou wert,
Withdrew thee from this wicked court: for Aſſur
Had poiſon'd thee that he might wed thy mother,
Thought to exterminate the royal race,
And open thus his paſſage to the throne:
But whilſt the kingdom mourn'd thy loſs, Phradates,
Our faithful friend, ſecreted and preſerv'd thee;
With ſkilful hand the precious herbs prepar'd,
O'er Perſia ſpread by her benignant God,
Whoſe wond'rous pow'r drew forth the latent venom
From thy parch'd limbs: his own ſon dying, you
Supply'd his place, and ſtill wert call'd Arſaces.
He waited patient for ſome lucky change,
But the great judge of kings had otherwiſe
Determin'd; truth at length deſcends from heav'n,
And vengeance riſes from the tomb.

Arſ. O God!
Enough already haſt thou try'd thy ſervant,
Or muſt I yield that life which you reſtor'd?
Yes: I was born midſt grandeur, ſhame, and horror:
My mother—Ninus! O what deadly purpoſe—

But

But if the traitor Aſſur was alone
To blame, if he———
Oro. Behold this paper here, [*Giving him the letter.*
Too faithful witneſs of her guilt, then ſay
If yet a doubt remains.
Arſ. Haſte, give it me,
And clear them all. [*He reads.*
Ha! " *Ninus to Phradates:*
" *I die by poiſon, guard my Ninias well,*
" *Defend him from his foes: my guilty wife*———
Oro. Need'ſt thou more proof? this witneſs came from thee.
He had not finiſh'd; death, thou ſee'ſt, broke off
Th' imperfect ſcroll, and ſtopp'd his feeble hand;
Phradates hath unfolded all the reſt,
Read this, and learn the whole. [*Gives him another paper.*
It is enough
That Ninus hath commanded thee, he guides
Thy ſteps, and leads thee to the throne, but ſays
He muſt have blood.
Arſ. O day of miracles, [*After reading the paper.*
And you, ye dreadful oracles from hell,
Dark as the tomb which I muſt viſit, how
Shall I unveil your ſecret purpoſes,
When he who is to make the ſacrifice
Knows not his victim! Who ſhall guide my choice?
I tremble at it.
Oro. Tremble for the guilty.
Amidſt the horrors that oppreſs thy ſoul,
The gods will guide thee; deem not thou thyſelf
A common mortal, from the race of men
Thou art diſtinguiſh'd, ſet apart by heav'n,
And noted by its ſignature divine.
Walk thou ſecure, tho' night conceals thy fate,
The gods of thy great anceſtors employ thee
But as their inſtrument, what right haſt thou
To litigate their pow'r, and to oppoſe
Thy maſters? Sav'd from death, as thou haſt been,
Be thankful ſtill; complain not, but adore.

SCENE III.

ARSACES, MITRANES.

Arſ. I cannot reconcile this ſtrange event:
Semiramis my mother! can it be?
Mit. My lord, the people in this hour of terror
[*entering in haſte.*
Demand their king: permit me firſt to hail thee
The huſband of Semiramis, and lord
Of Babylon: the queen is haſting hither
In ſearch of thee; I bleſs the happy hour
That gave her to thee: ha! not anſwer me!
Deſpair is in thy looks, thy lips are clos'd
In dreadful ſilence, thou art pale with terror,
And thy whole frame's diſorder'd: what has paſs'd?
What have they ſaid?
Arſ. I'll fly to Azema.
Mit. Amazing! can it be Arſaces? fly
A queen's embraces; ſcorn her proffer'd love;
Inſult her choice; the royal hand that ſpurn'd
Kings for thy ſake! thus are her hopes betray'd.
Arſ. Gods! 'tis Semiramis herſelf; O Ninus,
Now let thy tomb in its dark boſom hide
Her crimes, and me!

SCENE IV.

SEMIRAMIS, ARSACES.

Sem. Arſaces, all is ready,
We want but thee, great maſter of the world,
Whoſe fate, like mine, depends on thee; O haſte,
And make our bliſs complete! with joy I ſee
Thy brows encircled with that ſacred wreath:
The prieſt, I know, was by the gods commanded
To crown thee with it; heav'n and hell at once
Approve

Approve thy choice, and by theſe ſigns confirm it:
Aſſur's ſeditious party, ſtruck with awe
And holy rev'rence, tremble at my preſence;
Ninus, at length propitious, hath requir'd
A ſacrifice, O haſte, and give it him,
That we may ſoon be bleſt: the people's hearts
Are all with us, and Aſſur's threats are vain.
Arſ. Aſſur! away! in his perfidious blood
[*walking out with great emotion.*
The parricide—we will revenge thee, Ninus.
Sem. What do I hear? juſt heav'n! ſpeak'ſt thou of him,
Of Ninus?
Arſ. Said'ſt thou not, his guilty hand [*wildly.*
Had ſhed—to arm againſt his queen! the ſlave,
[*coming to himſelf.*
That was enough to make me hate him.
Sem. Haſte then,
Receive my hand, and thus begin thy vengeance.
Arſ. My father!
Sem. Ha! what looks are thoſe, Arſaces?
Is this the ſoft ſubmiſſive tender heart
Which I expected from thee, when I gave
My willing hand? That fearful prodigies,
And ſpectres riſing from the dark domain,
Shou'd leave the marks of horror on thy ſoul,
Alarms me not, I feel them too, but leſs
When I behold Arſaces: do not thus
O'erſpread this faireſt dawn of happineſs
With ſorrow's gloomy ſhade, but ſtill appear
Such as thou wert when trembling at my feet,
Leſt Aſſur e'er ſhould be thy maſter; fear
Nor him, nor Ninus and his angry ſhade;
My dear Arſaces, thou art my ſupport,
My lord, my huſband.
Arſ. 'Tis too much, O ſtop: [*turning aſide from her.*
Her guilt o'erwhelms me.
Sem. How his ſoul's diſturb'd!
Alas! he wants that peace which he beſtow'd
On me.
Arſ. Semiramis——

Sem. What woud'ſt thou? ſpeak.
Arſ. I cannot: leave me, leave me: hence! begone.
Sem. Amazing! leave thee! can I e'er forſake
Arſaces? O explain this myſtery to me,
And eaſe my tortur'd ſoul: it makes us both
Unhappy:—ha! deſpair is in thy aſpect;
Thou chill'ſt my veins with horror, and thy eyes
Are dreadful; they affright me more than heav'n
And hell united to oppoſe my vows:
Scarce can my trembling lips pronounce, I love thee:
Some pow'r inviſible now leads me on
Towards thee, now witholds me from thy arms,
And mingles, how I know not, tend'reſt love
With ſentiments of horror and deſpair.
Arſ. Hate me, abhor me.
Sem. Can'ſt thou bid me hate thee?
Cruel Arſaces, No: I ſtill muſt trace
Thy footſteps, ſtill my heart muſt follow thine:
What is that paper which thou look'ſt on thus
With horror, whilſt thy eyes are bath'd in tears,
Does that contain a reaſon for thy coldneſs?
Arſ. It does.
Sem. Then give it me.
Arſ. I muſt not: dar'ſt thou—
Sem. I'll have it.
Arſ. Leave to me that dreadful ſcroll.
To thee 'twere fatal, I have uſe for it.
Sem. Whence came it?
Arſ. From the gods.
Sem. And wrote by whom?
Arſ. Wrote by my father.
Sem. Ha! what ſay'ſt thou?
Arſ. Tremble.
Sem. Give it me, let me know at once my fate.
Arſ. Urge it no more; there's death in ev'ry line.
Sem. No matter: clear my doubts, or I ſhall think
That thou art guilty.
Arſ. Ye immortal pow'rs
That guide our ſteps, it is to your decrees
That I ſubmit.

Sem.

Sem. For the laſt time, Arſaces,
I here command thee, liſten, and obey.
Arſ. O may thy juſtice, heav'n, be ſatisfy'd!
[*giving her the letter.*
And this the only puniſhment that e'er
Shall be inflicted on her! now 'tis paſt,
And thou wilt know too much. [*She reads.*
Sem. What do I read? [*to* Otanes.
Support me, or I die. [*She faints.*
Arſ. She ſees it all.
Sem. Delay not, but fulfil thy deſtiny:
[*coming to herſelf, after a long ſilence.*
Puniſh this guilty, this unhappy wretch,
And in my blood waſh out the deadly ſtain.
Nature deceiv'd is horrible to both,
Revenge thy father, ſtrike, and puniſh me.
Arſ. No: let the ſacred character I bear,
The name of ſon, preſerve me from that crime!
Much rather wou'd I pierce the heart of him
Who ſtill reveres thee, the poor loſt Arſaces.
Sem. Be cruel as Semiramis, ſhe felt [*kneeling.*
No pity, therefore be the ſon of Ninus,
And take my life: thou wilt not; nay, thy tears
Ev'n mix with mine: O Ninias, 'tis a day
Of horrors, yet there's pleaſure in this pain.
Before thou giv'ſt me what I have deſerv'd,
The ſtroke of death, let nature's voice be heard:
O let a guilty mother's tears bedew
That dear, that fatal hand.
Arſ. I am thy ſon,
'Tis not for thee, whate'er thy guilt, to fall
Thus at my feet: O riſe, thy Ninias begs,
He loves thee ſtill, ſtill vows obedience to thee,
Reſpect and pureſt love: conſider me
As a new ſubject, only more ſubmiſſive,
More humble than the reſt; I hope, more dear.
Heav'n that reſtores thy ſon is ſure appeas'd:
The gods who pardon thee reſerve their vengeance
For Aſſur, leave him to his fate.
Sem. Receive
My crown and ſceptre, I have much diſgrac'd them.

Arſ.

Arſ. Still, I beſeech you, hold me ignorant
Of all, and let me with the world adore you.
Sem. O no: my guilt's too flagrant.
Arſ. But repentance
May blot it out.
Sem. Ninus hath given to thee
The reins of empire, thou muſt not offend
His vengeful ſpirit.
Arſ. O it will relent
At thy remorſe, and ſoften at my tears.
Otanes, in the name of heav'n preſerve
My mother, and conceal the horrid ſecret.

ACT V. SCENE I.

SEMIRAMIS, OTANES.

Ota. O'Twas ſome god that ſmil'd propitious on thee,
Who thus prevented theſe abhorred nuptials;
Whilſt nature ſhudder'd at the approaching danger,
Gave thee a ſon, and ſav'd thee thus from inceſt.
The oracles of Ammon, and the voice
From hell, the ſhades of Ninus, all declar'd
The day appointed for thy ſecond marriage
Shou'd end thy ſorrows, but they never ſaid
That marriage e'er ſhou'd be accompliſh'd: No:
The nuptials were prepar'd: thou haſt fulfill'd
Thy deſtiny: thy ſon reveres thee ſtill:
Mild is the juſtice of offended heav'n,
Which only aſks a private ſacrifice:
This day Semiramis ſhall ſtill be happy.
Sem. Alas! there is no happineſs for me,
Otanes: Ninias ſmiles indeed upon me:
A mother's ſorrows for a time will plead
More ſtrongly with him than the blood of Ninus,
And my paſt crimes; but ſoon his tenderneſs

And

And filial love may change perhaps to wrath
And fierce reſentment for a murther'd father.
Ota. What fear'ſt thou from a ſon? what dire preſage—
Sem. Fear is the nat'ral puniſhment of guilt,
And ſtill attends it: this deteſted Aſſur,
Has he attempted aught, ſay, does he know
What paſs'd of late, and who Arſaces is?
Ota. The dreadful ſecret ſtill remains unknown;
The ſhade of Ninus is by all rever'd;
But how to comprehend the oracle
They know not; how they muſt avenge his aſhes;
How ſerve his ſon—the minds of men are ſtruck
With wild aſtoniſhment, in ſilence now
They wait the hour when the ſelf-open'd tomb
Shall baniſh all their fears, and make them happy.
Mean time the ſoldiers are in arms, the people
Croud to the altars; wretched Azema,
Trembling and pale, with terror in her looks,
Walks round the tomb, and lifts her hands to heav'n;
Whilſt Ninias ſtands aſtoniſh'd in the temple,
Prepar'd to ſtrike his victim yet unknown:
The gloomy Aſſur meditates revenge,
Unites the remnants of his ſcatter'd party,
And forms ſome dark deſign.
Sem. I have kept fair
Too long already with him: ſeize the traitor,
Otanes, bear him to my ſon in chains;
Ninias ſhall ſoon appeaſe eternal juſtice,
At leaſt with Aſſur's blood, my vile accomplice.
Ninias, thou ſee'ſt I am a mother ſtill;
Thou ſee'ſt my heart, O take it, take it all,
And make it riſe a grateful ſacrifice!
Ha! who approaches with ſuch haſty ſteps?
How ev'ry thing appals my flutt'ring ſoul!

SCENE

SCENE II.

SEMIRAMIS, AZEMA, OTANES.

Aze. O queen, forgive me if I come uncall'd;
But terrors worſe than death have forc'd me thus
To claſp thy knees, and beg thy royal mercy—
Sem. What wou'd'ſt thou, princeſs? ſpeak.
Aze. To ſnatch a hero
From inſtant danger, ſtop a traitor's hand,
And ſave Arſaces.
Sem. Ha! what hand? Arſaces!
Aze. He is thy huſband, Azema's betray'd,
He lives for you alone; no matter—
Sem. He
My huſband! gods!
Aze. The ſacred tie that binds you—
Sem. The tie is dreadful, impious, and abhorr'd:
Arſaces is—but ſpeak, go on; I tremble:
What dangers? haſte and tell me.
Aze. Well thou know'ſt,
Perhaps this very moment, whilſt I aſk
Thy aid, perhaps—
Sem. Well, what?
Aze. That demi-god
Whom we adore demands the ſacrifice
Within the dreary lab'rinths of the tomb:
What are the crimes Arſaces muſt atone for
I know not.
Sem. Crimes! juſt heav'n!
Aze. But impious Aſſur
Hath ſworn to violate that ſacred place
Which mortals dare not enter.
Sem. Ay! indeed!
Hath Aſſur ſworn it?
Aze. In the dead of night
The wily traitor had long ſince ſecur'd
A ſafe retreat, if e'er occaſion call'd,
Within the ſecret winding of the tomb,

Where

Where now he means to do the bloody deed,
To brave the pow'rs of hell, and wrath of heav'n;
With ſacrilegious hand he wou'd deſtroy
The generous Arſaces.
Sem. Heav'n! what ſay'ſt thou?
By what deteſted means?
Aze. Believe a heart
By love enlighten'd, and by love inſpir'd:
I knew the traitor's rank envenom'd hatred,
Mark'd how the trembling faction by his zeal
Reviv'd; I pry'd into their ſecret councils,
Pretended to unite his cauſe with mine,
And join our int'reſts; I've look'd into him,
Have wreſted from his heart the fatal ſecret.
Boldly he marches on, and hopes to paſs
Unpuniſh'd: well he knows that none dare enter
That holy place, not Oroes himſelf:
Thither he's gone: mean time his ſlaves report
Arſaces is the victim that muſt die
For Babylon, and Ninus in his blood
Shall ſatiate his revenge: the nobles meet,
The people murmur; Ninus, Aſſur, heav'n,
Are all incens'd: I tremble for Arſaces.
Sem. My deareſt Azema, heav'n ſpeaks by thee:
It is enough: I ſee what muſt be done.
Repoſe thyſelf with ſafety on a mother;
Daughter, our danger is the ſame; go thou,
Defend thy huſband, I will ſave my ſon.
Aze. O heav'n!
Sem. I meant to wed him, but the gods
In mercy have forbad it: they inſpire
A hapleſs mother now:—but time is preci us;
Go: leave me here, and in my name command
The nobles, prieſts, and people, to attend me.
[Azema *goes into the porch of the temple, and* Semiramis *advances towards the tomb.*
Thou ſhade of Ninus, lo! I fly t'avenge thee;
The hour is come when thou didſt promiſe me
Admittance to thy tomb; I have obey'd thee,
Call'd by thy voice, behold me here to ſave
My ſon. Ye guards, that wait around my throne,
Approach:

Approach: henceforth Arſaces is your king;
No more obedient to Semiramis,
Obſerve his laws, to him the ſov'reign pow'r
I here reſign; be you his ſubjects now,
And his defenders.

[*Guards appear, and range themſelves on each ſide at the further part of the ſtage.*

Gracious heaven! protect me. [*She goes into the tomb.*

SCENE III.

Aze. What can ſhe purpoſe? O it is too late
[*returning from the porch of the temple to the front of the ſtage.*
To ſave him now; I know not what to think:
'Tis wond'rous all; O'tis a dreadful moment,
Arſaces! Ninias! ye immortal pow'rs
Who guide our fate, O ſay, did you reſtore
My lov'd Arſaces but to ſnatch him from me?

SCENE IV.

AZEMA, NINIAS.

Aze. Ha! Ninias! can it be? Art thou indeed
Great Ninus' ſon, my ſov'reign, and my huſband?
Nin. O! thou behold'ſt me, Azema, aſham'd
To know myſelf, ſprung from the blood of gods,
And ſhudd'ring at the thought: O! Azema,
Remove my terrors, calm my troubled ſoul,
Strengthen my arm uprais'd t'avenge a father.
Aze. Take heed how thou perform'ſt that dreadful office.
Nin. He hath commanded, and I muſt obey.
Aze. Ninus wou'd never ſacrifice his ſon:
Impoſſible!
Nin. What ſays my Azema?

Aze.

Azc. Ne'er ſhalt thou enter that abhorred place,
For know, a traitor lies in wait for thee.
Nin. Who ſhall withhold or terrify Arſaces?
Azc. Thou art the victim to be offer'd there:
With ſacrilegious ſteps the impious Aſſur
Profanes the ſacred tomb, and raſhly dares
To violate its privilege divine:
He waits thee there.
Nin. Good heav'n! then all is plain;
I'm ſatisfy'd: the victim is prepar'd;
My father, poiſon'd by the wicked Aſſur,
Demands the traitor's blood: inſtructed thus
By Oroes, and conducted by the gods,
Arm'd by the hand of Ninus' ſelf, I go
To puniſh the aſſaſſin: thither led
By heav'n's eternal juſtice, my weak hand
Is but the inſtrument of pow'r divine:
The gods do all, and my aſtoniſh'd ſoul
Yields to that voice which muſt decree my fate:
Spite of ourſelves, our ways are noted down,
Mark'd, and determin'd: prodigies are ſpread
Around the throne, and ſpirits call'd from hell
To wander here: but fearleſs I obey,
Believe, and truſt in heav'n.
Azc. Whate'er the gods
Have done but fills my ſoul with ſad diſmay:
Ninus was lov'd by them; yet Ninus periſh'd.
Nin. But now they will avenge him: ceaſe thy plaints.
Azc. Oft have they choſe the pureſt victim, oft
Have ſhed the blood of innocence.
Nin. No more;
They will defend whom thus they have united:
They by a father's voice exhorted us,
Gave me a throne, a mother, and a wife.
Soon ſhalt thou ſee me ſprinkled with the blood
Of the vile murth'rer; from the tomb thoſe gods
Shall lead me to the altar; I obey;
It is enough: the reſt be left to heav'n.

SCENE

SCENE V.

AZEMA alone.

O guard his footſteps in this fatal tomb!
Ye pow'rs inſcrutable, whoſe blood muſt flow
This day? I tremble for th' event, and dread
The hand of Aſſur, long inur'd to ſlaughter;
E'en on his father's aſhes may be ſhed
The blood of Ninias: O may the dark womb
Of hell receive and ſwallow up his rage!
Ye light'nings blaſt him! O illuſtrious ſhade
Of Ninus, wherefore woud'ſt thou not permit
A wretched wife to go with her dear lord?
O guide, ſupport him in this place of darkneſs!
Did I not hear the voice of Ninias mix'd
With deadly groans? O wou'd this ſacred tomb,
Which I profane, but open to my wiſhes
The gate of death!—I will deſcend:—I go—
Hark! the earth ſhakes, and dreadful light'nings flaſh
Athwart the ſkies: fear, hope, deſpair—he comes.

SCENE VI.

NINIAS, a bloody ſword in his hand, AZEMA.

Nin. O heav'n! where am I?
Aze. O! my lord, you're pale,
And bloody, froz'n with horror.
Nin. 'Tis the blood
Of the vile parricide: I wander'd down
Ev'n to the bottom of the tomb; my father
Still led me onward thro' its winding paths,
He walk'd before, and pointed out the place
Of my revenge: there, by th' imperfect light
That glimmer'd thro' the dreary vault, I ſaw,
Or thought I ſaw, uprais'd, the murth'rer's ſword:
Methought

Methought he trembled; guilt is ever fearful:
Twice did I plunge my ſword into his heart,
And with my bloody arm, which rage had ſtrengthen'd,
Had drag'd him in the duſt towards the place
Whence the dim rays of light appear'd: and yet
I own to thee, his deep heart-rending ſighs,
The mournful ſounds, imperfect as they were,
That reach'd my ears, his humble vows to heav'n,
With that repentance which in his laſt hour
Seem'd to poſſeſs his ſoul, the hallow'd place,
The voice of pity, which, revenge once o'er,
Calls loudly on us, with I know not what
Of dark myſterious terror, ſhook my ſoul,
And made me leave the bleeding victim there.
What can this trouble, this ſtrange horror mean
That dwells upon me, Azema? My heart
Is pure, ye gods, my hands are innocent,
Stain'd only with the blood you bid me ſhed;
I've ſerv'd the cauſe of heav'n, and yet am wretched.

Aze. The dead are ſatisfy'd, and nature too:
Come let us quit this horrid place, and ſeek
Thy mother, ſhe ſhall calm thy troubled mind:
Since Aſſur is no more———

SCENE VII.

NINIAS, AZEMA, ASSUR.

[Aſſur *appears at a diſtance with* Otanes, *ſurrounded by guards.*

Aze. O heav'n! he's there.
Nin. Aſſur!
Aze. O haſte, ye miniſters of heav'n,
Ye ſervants of the king, defend your maſter.

SCENE VIII.

OROES, the high-prieſt, with the magi and people aſſembled, OTANES, NINIAS, AZEMA, MITRANES, ASSUR diſarm'd.

Ota. They need not: by the queen's command I've ſeiz'd
The traitor, who attempted to profane
Your ſacred monument, and enter there:
I ſhall deliver him to thee.

Nin. Alas!
What victim then hath Ninias ſacrific'd?

Oro. Heav'n is appeas'd, and vengeance now complete.
Behold, ye people, your king's murtherer.
[*pointing to* Aſſur.
Behold, ye people, your king's ſucceſſor.
[*pointing to* Ninias.
'Tis Ninias, Babylon's loſt prince, reſtor'd:
He is your ſov'reign, know him, and obey.

Aſſ. Thou Ninias!

Ota. Ay; 'tis he: the guardian god,
Who ſav'd him from thy rage, hath brought him hither;
That god whoſe vengeance hath o'ertaken thee.

Aſſ. Ha! did Semiramis then give thee life?

Nin. She did, and pow'r withal to puniſh thee:
Guards, take him hence, and rid me of a monſter.
He was not worthy of my ſword; to fall
By Ninias' hand had been a death too glorious.
The victim hath eſcap'd me; let him die,
Ev'n as he liv'd, with infamy: away.

Aſſ. It is my heavieſt puniſhment to ſee
Ninias my ſov'reign: but 'tis pleaſure ſtill
To leave thee more unhappy than myſelf;
[Semiramis *appears at the foot of the tomb wounded, and almoſt dead, one of the magi ſupporting her.*
Look yonder, and behold what thou haſt done.
[*pointing to* Semiramis.

Nin. Whom have I ſlain?

Aze.

Aze. Fly, my dear Ninias, fly
This fatal place.
Mit. What haſt thou done?
Oro. Away;
[*placing himſelf between* Ninias *and the tomb.*
And cleanſe thoſe bloody hands: give me the ſword,
That fatal inſtrument of wrath divine.
Nin. No: let me plunge it to my heart.
[*He attempts to deſtroy himſelf, the guards interpoſe.*
Oro. Diſarm him.
Sem. Revenge me, O my ſon: ſome baſe aſſaſſin
[*Brought forward and ſeated on a ſofa.*
Has ſlain thy mother.
Nin. O unhappy hour;
Unheard of guilt! for know, that baſe aſſaſſin,
That monſter was—thy ſon: this hand hath pierc'd
The breaſt that nouriſh'd and ſupported me:
But ſoon thou ſhalt have vengeance, Ninias ſoon
Shall follow thee.
Sem. I went into the tomb
To ſave thee, Ninias; thy unhappy mother—
But from thy hands I have receiv'd the fate
I merited.
Nin. This laſt, this fatal ſtroke,
Sinks deep into my ſoul: but here I call
Thoſe gods to witneſs who conducted me,
Thoſe who miſled my ſteps—
Sem. No more, my ſon:
Freely I pardon thee, and only make
This laſt requeſt, that thoſe dear hands may cloſe
My dying eyes. [*He kneels.*
A mother begs it of thee:
Thy heart I know was ſtranger to the deed:
O wou'd that I had been as innocent
When Ninus dy'd! but I have ſuffer'd for it.
Henceforth let mortals know, that there are crimes
Offended heaven never can forgive.
O Ninias, Azema, let your bleſt union
Blot out my crimes; come near your dying mother;
Give me your hands; long may ye live and reign
In happineſs! that hope ſtill gives me comfort,

And

And mingles joy ev'n with the pangs of death.
It comes, I feel it. O! my children, think
On your Semiramis. O do not hate
My mem'ry—O my ſon, my ſon—tis paſt.

Oro. Her eyes are ſunk in darkneſs: help the king
And guard his life. Learn from her ſad example,
That heav'n is witneſs to our ſecret crimes:
The higher is the criminal, remember,
The gods inflict the greater puniſhment;
Kings, tremble on your thrones, and fear their juſtice.

END of the FIFTH and laſt ACT.

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